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MADNESS IN  
SHAKESPEARIAN TRAGEDY







# MADNESS IN SHAKESPEARIAN TRAGEDY

BY

H. SOMERVILLE

MEMBER OF THE ROYAL MEDICO-PSYCHOLOGICAL ASSOCIATION  
AUTHOR OF VARIOUS PAPERS IN ABNORMAL PSYCHOLOGY

WITH A PREFACE BY  
WYNDHAM LEWIS



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## CONTENTS

	PAGE
PREFACE	I
INTRODUCTION	9
I. THE MENTALITY OF HAMLET	<u>17</u>
II. MACBETH: A PARANOIAC	41
III. THE TEMPORARY INSANITY OF OTHELLO	69
(IV. THE MANIA OF LEAR	<u>98</u>
V. THE MANIA OF OPHELIA	<u>133</u>
(VI. THE MADNESS OF LADY MACBETH	143
VII. GONERIL: A MENTAL MONSTROSITY	161
VIII. BRUTUS'S MENTAL BREAKDOWN	168
IX. TIMON'S MEGALOMANIA	187
X. THE MANIA OF CONSTANCE	197



## PREFACE

How far a person whose only existence is what he derives from the text of a play is amenable to diagnosis by a doctor must depend, I suppose, upon the degree of reality with which he has been endowed by his creator. No literary artist has ever been more competent than William Shakespeare to achieve this intense reality. It confers upon the least remark of the persons we find in the great plays a remarkably authentic air, that produces an illusion of nature.

Dr Somerville takes advantage of this: he treats the characters of Shakespeare as though they were breathing persons in our midst. Indeed Pirandello himself could not approach, say, Othello with more of the respect due from one creature to another than that displayed by Dr Somerville. Desdemona becomes a young lady like another—a bright though rather weak girl: he even feels that her end, painful as it undoubtedly was, still is hardly to be regretted; her life would not have been a happy one, poor girl, with an impotent husband! Or one is reminded of the professional credulity of the evangelical divine, who will chat familiarly about the movements of Judas or of Jesus on the morning of the latter's apprehension, or the probable antecedents of the Woman of Samaria, as if he

## PREFACE

were "reminiscing," and he and Judas had been "college chums," who had lost sight of each other latterly, or as though he had been born and reared upon the borders of Samaria. But Dr Somerville has a quite different professional axe to grind from that of the priest: he is the mad-doctor, and he has been called in to clear up the problem of the sanity of this shakespearean world. He is concerned in short purely with the question as to whether, had these people come individually beneath his care, he would have certified them or not. His answer is that in most cases he would have done so: at all events, in the fifth Act of any shakespearean tragedy all the principal characters would, were he called in, go straight to Colney Hatch, and that most have the seeds of madness long before their entrance in Act I.

Meanwhile, Dr Somerville has done me the honour to say that my book, *The Lion and the Fox*, is the only place where he has seen it stated that Shakespeare was particularly prone to the description of demented persons. That will explain my rôle as "Announcer" on this occasion. I will venture to make a few remarks as to the conduct of the very interesting examination at which it has been my privilege to assist: but the last word must remain, naturally, with the physician.

First, then, I should myself be inclined to think that his report upon Timon of Athens as a clear case of syphilitic poisoning involved too technical an explanation of the behaviour of that character: the necessity of judging him,

## PREFACE

as a certifiable person, *before* and *after* his social downfall, presents a serious difficulty: for if it is true of the syphilitically insane that they are at once exceedingly lavish and full of the milk of human kindness, and that irritability is the last thing to be expected of them, then, although certainly Timon's liberality might have been the result of mania resulting from syphilis, his subsequent undeniable irritability would suggest that the infection was wearing off: you would be left with nothing more than the violence involved in loss of temper and the degree of insanity that goes with it. The alleged pathologic ground would be snatched from under the feet of the person submitted to our curious judgment. Mad liberality often exists without the intervention of syphilis, but, on the other hand, frantic irritability is not met with in that conjunction, we learn from Dr Somerville. This would seem to absolve Timon of Athens of the charge of having contracted syphilis (especially as Shakespeare, his creator, does not mention anywhere that he had had it, though as Dr Somerville points out he is prone to suspect it in others, and that is a little suspicious). But it leaves his insanity, presumably of some other order, intact.

It is with the greatest deference to the distinguished physician who is the author of this book that I tentatively advance this suggestion, not in order to criticize, but merely to illustrate the nature of my own difficulties in reading this doctor's certificate of the various shakespearean star-figures with whom we are

## PREFACE

all familiar. I do think that their dementia has not been enough remarked upon; but I dare say that, able only to build up his diagnosis from their utterances in the shakespearean text, it may be that there is really not enough material to go upon to affirm with such absolute certainty what the particular disease was, as in the instance of his treatment of Timon.

Othello as a eunuch, and Hamlet as a homo-sexual, on the other hand, appear to me to offer us a plausible explanation of some of the eccentricities of those characters. Desdemona, as she appears on the modern stage, answers to what one would imagine would be the attitude of a woman wedded to an impotent negro pugilist, say, in love with his muscles and his championship-belt, but a little wistful on account of his unfortunate shortcomings as a bedmate. As to Hamlet's behaviour towards Ophelia it is, in fact, rather suggestive of homo-sexuality, and the bosom-friend Horatio certainly supplies a valuable clue. If Hamlet was in love with his gentleman of the bed-chamber, then his persiflage where the rather over-simple piece of femininity for whom the *bon papa bourgeois* Polonius was responsible would I suppose be explained.

Many readers I dare say will find, as I have, in Dr Somerville's account of Macbeth, the most notable contribution in this book to the problem of the mental condition of this formidable set of people, the giants of shakespearean tragedy. He is particularly happy in his



## PREFACE

emphasis upon the fact that Macbeth was a good man gone wrong, indeed that it was "the milk of human kindness" that was his downfall, once allowance is made for Lady Macbeth. But even with Macbeth, I think, Dr Somerville tends to interpret the text too realistically in places, as where, for instance, he quotes the lines (p. 50): "Will all great Neptune's ocean," etc. That is rhetoric, and scarcely bears the realistic interpretative burden placed upon it.

I thoroughly agree with Dr Somerville where he says (p. 12) "the whole question of the correct interpretation of the plays is involved"—namely, in whether you decide that the characters are mad, or just possess "such trifling insanity" as Dr Bradley allows them. But, on the other hand, *more* of them are mad for Dr Somerville than for me.

"The question of sanity or insanity is a relative one. The border of demarcation is broad and ill-defined," Dr Somerville writes (p. 96). The "mad" of Polonius is a very crude counter, naturally, and even the possibility of being "nothing else but mad" (or its opposite, for that matter, to be "nothing else but sane") we can reject. Still, some further definition is probably necessary.

\* What is most generally meant, no doubt, when the average man employs the word "mad," is something that could most accurately be applied to himself: for if to be the victim of a constant indestructible delusion is to be insane, then certainly we all are fairly

## PREFACE

insane: and further than that, those most "normal" are the most mad. The greater part of men and women live plunged in the depths of the great naïf hallucination that causes them to struggle passionately for what, regarded dispassionately, would be strictly nothing, and that passion is surely insanity, if anything is. To accept every appearance without question (in the sense of those questions asked by the philosophic man), to ask your butcher to give you a "nice" pork-chop or your restaurateur a "nice" beefsteak, to refer to yourself as "noble" when you are engaged in the most unbecoming and indeed (if that may be said, as between sane individuals) the most insane actions of murderous violence; for it to be your tendency, unless corrected and disciplined by some impulse exterior to yourself, to exalt all that is meanest, and to seek to circumvent and to disintegrate all that is finest—are not these things, taken at random, characteristic of our nature, and are they not the actions and impulses of "dementia"? To be *quite* sane we should all have to vomit at the sight of a side of beef or some nice giblets, should we not?—as to those small frilled pigs in the windows of provision merchants, I have surprised a look of slight disgust upon the face of even the most hardened "normal" fellow, as he gazed at one of them: we should have, I am afraid, even to laugh outright whenever we met a two-legged animal like ourselves: and as for those very gallant gentlemen who engage themselves to be the

## PREFACE

pilots of military aeroplanes, destined to drop colossal bombs upon the houses of sleeping families (of whatever nationality at the moment labelled "enemy")—from them, if we were really entirely "sane," we should turn in amazement and horror, and, as members of the electorate of an enlightened democracy, we should arrange that they be apprehended immediately and sent to some suitable reformatory, where their abominable coarse childishness might, after prolonged treatment, be charmed out of them, when they might be returned to civilized society provisionally. Life as the average live it, who can doubt, is "A tale told by an idiot, full of sound and fury, signifying *nothing*," that is the "normal" life.

This is not the sense however in which we could use the word "insane" for so many of the great figures of shakespearean tragedy. Most often they are a higher type of man, "maddened," perhaps, by conflict with the herd, or in a combat of wits with some of the more cunning of the demented average—that is the case of Othello. With them, when they become mad, it is rather the isolation of one idea, the *idée fixe*, in short, that marks them down as "insane." Whether syphilis or shell-shock has been the proximate cause of this is really the subject of Dr Somerville's book: and that of course he cannot definitely tell us: all he can say is that the symptoms have an analogy to this lesion or to that, to this disease or that. His statement at the outset, in his introduction, is to this effect.

## PREFACE

\* The isolation, in the mind, of one idea (to the exclusion of everything that surrounds and modifies it in the universe) is characteristic of most madness. But there is such a thing, I should like to contend, as *shakespearian madness*, as it might be called, on the analogy of "midsummer madness": for the idea that is isolated can obviously be either a stupid idea or an intelligent one, a bad one or a good one; and what certainly characterizes "shakespearian madness" is that almost invariably it is a noble and generous one. There is certainly a "decay of altruism" in the case of most of these "heroes"—the heroism does not take the form of an exaggeration of altruism: the impulses of his Hamlets, Timons, Antonys, Othellos, Lears, are, so far as is consistent at all with human conditions, the reverse of mean or stupid. This is as much so with his great creations as it is in the case of Cervantes' Don Quixote. And this madness is the result, usually, of their realization of some besetting depravity or falseness in the general world of men, which threatens, or condemns to futility, some specific hope, or "wish," of their more ardent, more sensitively equipped natures. In short, they are as much "heroes" as the canons of the most conventional drama could require. Nothing, I think, in Dr Somerville's book contradicts this view of the shakespearian hero, and it is even an attempt to supply a scientific basis for it.

WYNDHAM LEWIS.

## INTRODUCTION

THE insanity rife among the principal characters of Shakespeare's tragedies has been, and still is, a source of immense trouble to Shakespearian critics.

In the Irving-Marshall edition of the plays the editors of *King Lear*, while practically acknowledging that Lear becomes mad during the action of the play, do so with marked reluctance. "There is little satisfaction," they complain, "in approaching the study of Lear from the standpoint of Colney Hatch ; indeed it is all but impossible to the reader who rises to the due height of the play."

This is an artistic viewpoint which one would wish to treat with all due sympathy and respect. At the same time it would be manifestly unwise to shut our eyes to the reality of Lear's insanity. It is a stubborn fact which may not be overlooked, and which must be faced, and its nature and significance explained if we are to interpret correctly his "mad" speeches and behaviour.

In the course of his lecture on *The Substance of Tragedy* Dr Bradley makes clear the degree

## INTRODUCTION

of importance he would assign to insanity as an agent used by Shakespeare in the making of his tragedies.

✎ “Shakespeare [he tells us] occasionally, and for reasons which need not be discussed here, represents abnormal conditions of mind; insanity, for example, somnambulism, hallucinations. And deeds issuing from these are not what are called deeds in the fullest sense, deeds expressive of character. No; but these abnormal conditions are never introduced as the origin of deeds of any dramatic moment.”

What is meant by a “deed of dramatic moment” seems clear enough; but, in order to avoid possible error, it will be as well to quote, from the same lecture, the passage in which the explanation may be found:

“We see a number of human beings placed in certain circumstances; and we see, arising from the co-operation of their characters in these circumstances, certain actions. These actions beget others, and these others beget others again, until this series of inter-connected deeds leads by an apparently inevitable sequence to a catastrophe.”

Dr Bradley's contention, then, is that the occurrence of insanity in a character in Shakespearian tragedy is an event of only occasional happening and, when it does occur, is of so little consequence as to have no practical



## INTRODUCTION

influence on the action of the play in which the character appears.

Professor Allardyce Nicoll, too, in his *Studies in Shakespeare* does not seem to attach much importance to insanity as an influence leading to a "deed of dramatic moment"; and his unfortunate lack of familiarity with the distorting effects of insanity on the mind has led him into the lamentable error of mistaking the content of Ophelia's love-fantasies for actual happenings. He does not seem to be aware that it is one of the commonest of common delusions for an insane woman (a virgin) to hold the belief that she has been unchaste, and, very often, to believe that she is with child. One can only hope that his dreadful misrepresentation of the conduct of the fair Ophelia will not be accepted as correct by any of his readers.

Mr Wyndham Lewis (*The Lion and the Fox*), on the other hand, is deeply impressed by the vast amount of lunacy he finds in these plays; and he looks upon madness as being an essential factor in the construction of a Shakespearian tragedy. He considers that "Hamlet, Lear, Othello, Timon are all demented (insane)," and that "the natural heightening everywhere in Shakespeare is by way of madness." Nothing can be more emphatic than his pronouncements :

## INTRODUCTION

“Shakespeare, like Cervantes, was occupied always with cases of insanity.”

“Madness accounts for the nihilism that surges up in every tragedy of Shakespeare, once the characters have become ‘mad’ enough with suffering.”

Two more completely opposed views than those of Dr Bradley and Mr Wyndham Lewis it would be difficult to find. Nor is it a minor matter on which they differ; for the whole question of the correct interpretation of the plays is involved. If, as Dr Bradley contends, such trifling insanity as appears in the tragedies is, in all important matters, negligible, criticism of the sayings and doings of the characters, in so far as these affect the motive of the play, may proceed on usual lines. But if the characters are mad, then, as everyone knows, their speeches and conduct (deeds) must not be judged by the same standard of criticism as that which serves for the appraisal of the conversation and behaviour (deeds) of ordinary sane beings.

It will be well to pause here for a moment or two to consider the subject under discussion. It is insanity. And I shall take the liberty of asking the reader to allow me to regard him as a personal friend and address him thus: My dear friend, will you, please, tell me what you mean by “insanity”? If you are an honest



## INTRODUCTION

reader—as no doubt you are—you will, after thinking the question out, reply: “I do not know.” Should you happen to be a mental specialist you will, if I put the same question to you, reply somewhat after this fashion: “I do not know what insanity *is*; but, although I cannot define ‘madness’ or ‘insanity,’ I can generally tell when a person is mad, and I can also tell you the form of madness from which he is suffering. Remember, however, that it has taken me years of practice to gain the knowledge necessary to enable me to do this.”

I ask William Shakespeare what he means by the term “madness”; and he, always ready with his joke, refers me to his oracle, our dear old friend Polonius, who, with his usual unconscious humour, thus delivers himself:

“to define true madness,  
What is’t, but to be nothing else but mad?”

I again consult Shakespeare and ask him how it is that there is so much misunderstanding about the meanings of the speeches of his mad characters; and he replies, rather rudely, in the words of the grave-digging clown: “‘Cannot you tell that? Every fool can tell that.’ If you had read *Hamlet* carefully it would hardly have been necessary for you to ask the question; for there you are told, at

## INTRODUCTION

least, the principal reason. It is because the hearers

‘botch the words up to fit their own thoughts.’”

Which thoughts, of course, represent efforts to explain the words of an insane person according to the standard of reasoning which would be applied to the interpretation of the language of the sane. There seems to be no doubt, in fact, that some experiential knowledge of the modes of speech and behaviour of insane people would help greatly towards a fuller understanding of the tragedies. For, in truth, the principal characters in Shakespearian tragedy are all *more or less* mad—some more, others less. It is useful to remember, too, that a “mad” character is not necessarily always mad during the action of the play in which he appears. He is generally quite mad in the end.

There is a viewpoint of Shakespearian tragedy which, as far as the writer is aware, has not been presented. It concerns the “catastrophe.” In the case of an insane character it may well be asked : Is the catastrophe in his death or in his madness? In the tragedy of *King Lear*, for example, are one’s feelings of pity aroused more strongly by watching the old king enduring the tortures of madness or by witnessing his death? He is fourscore and

## INTRODUCTION

upwards. He is, before his actual madness, showing signs of mental deterioration due to old age. For all useful purposes his career is finished. "His chief good and market of his time" is "but to sleep and feed," and hunt; and, towards the end, he is quite mad. Who can doubt that "the pity of it" lies in his insanity more than in his death?

It is useful, as throwing considerable light on Shakespeare's plans in building up a tragedy, to view his work from a psychological as well as from a dramatic-poetical angle. In this way attention is directed to the separate shocks he administers, one after another, to his characters for the express purpose, in the accomplishment of which he never fails, of driving them mad before killing them.

The following essays may be regarded as attempts to explain some of the difficulties occurring in the speeches, as well as those arising out of the strange and puzzling behaviour of the principal characters during their attacks of insanity.



# I

## THE MENTALITY OF HAMLET

WHEN Charles Lamb makes his well-known pronouncement, "We have all got a touch of *that same*—you understand me—a speck of the motley," he is, in spite of his genially jocular way of putting it, imparting a serious scientific truth; and had he been entertaining us with a dissertation on mental unsoundness in general, instead of discussing a particular form of it, he might well have given us a similar timely reminder, "We have all got a touch of *that same*—you understand me—a speck of the Tom o' Bedlam."

For mental unsoundness, or, as some of us with a comforting conviction of personal immunity choose to call it, *madness is a condition of degree*: we all have a *touch* of it. And thus it follows that to such terms as "mad" and "madness" or "insanity" no well-defined meaning can be assigned. Unless, then, we are content to accept Polonius's definition,

"to define true madness,  
What is't, but to be nothing else but mad?"

the use of the term, though convenient in ordinary discourse and allowable as sanctioned by custom, is, strictly speaking, indefensible. It would appear, therefore, that when it is asked, "Was Hamlet mad?" both the inquiry and any attempt to answer it with precision are equally futile. Again, in putting the question, the well-ascertained and widely known fact that persons of a certain type of unstable mentality may, at times, exhibit strongly marked signs, both in speech and behaviour, of mental disorder and at other times be ordinarily sane is strangely ignored. For Hamlet was just such a man. For the most part he is sane; or, at least, as sane as we can expect Hamlet with his quick-change disposition, his highly artistic temperament and his active imagination to be. At any rate he is not insane. On certain occasions, as when he is speaking the soliloquy,

"To be, or not to be . . ."

he is in a state very close to *melancholia*, that is, very close to insanity; and when, during his interview with Ophelia, he says of himself,

"I could accuse me of such things, that it were better my mother had not borne me. . . . What should such fellows as I do crawling between heaven and earth?"

he is suffering from a delusion of unworthiness—a very common symptom of *melancholia*.

## THE MENTALITY OF HAMLET

Indeed throughout the whole of this "nunnery scene" his mind is disordered to an extent incompatible with clarity of thought. He is not sane; nor is he quite mad. A vein of reason runs through his melancholy madness; or, shall we say a vein of insanity runs through his reason? He orders Ophelia to a nunnery. Why? Woman delights him not. He has been suffering from *melancholia* for several weeks. As in all melancholics, during an attack the sex-impulse is relegated to the background—practically disappears for the time. Through his clouded mind a streak of reason appears, informing him that owing to both physical disability and mental misery he is unfitted for marriage. He loved Ophelia once; he loves her still. She had been the idol of his soul; she is so still. He cannot possess her himself. The idea of anyone else taking his place is intolerable; and so she must go to a nunnery lest she should be a breeder of sinners—sinners like himself!

At other times, as in the soliloquy,

"'Tis now the very witching time of night,  
When churchyards yawn. . . ."

during which he could "drink hot blood," and discloses thoughts of killing his mother, he is in a state that can hardly be distinguished from one of *acute mania*; as he is when he kills Polonius; and, on another occasion, when he



#### MADNESS IN SHAKESPEARIAN TRAGEDY

would “drink up eisel” and “eat a crocodile.” His mother’s remarks on this attack are highly instructive, graphically describing as they do Hamlet’s alternating states of excitement and depression:

“ This is mere madness:  
And thus awhile the fit will work on him;  
Anon . . .  
His silence will sit drooping.”

[Again there are occasions when there is little doubt but that Hamlet was hallucinating, as when he hears the “ghost” saying “swear”; for the ghost being at that time safely housed in its daily quarters—“confined to fast in fires”—could not very well have been under the platform:] and when he sees and hears,

“ My father in his habit as he lived ! ”

everything points to the conclusion that he is experiencing an hallucination, and not seeing a ghost; and this not only because the Queen sees or hears nothing, but that, at the time, Hamlet’s disordered mind and the occasion were co-operative in suddenly throwing him into an hallucinatory state, in which he was living more or less in his subconscious world and creating for himself—for his private inspection only—a mental picture of his father;] much in the same way as mind and circumstance con-



## THE MENTALITY OF HAMLET

duced to make for Macbeth the hallucination of the dagger and, subsequently, of Banquo, to put the red spot on Lady Macbeth's hand, cause Lear to see and hear his pernicious daughters when they were not there, and Brutus to see the figure of the murdered Cæsar and hear his voice. So also Hamlet, with a guilty conscience added to a general state of mind suffering "the nature of an insurrection," creates for himself (subconsciously of course) a mental picture of his sire, with "an eye like Mars," coming his "tardy son to chide."

There are times, too, when Hamlet's mind, wearied by his sufferings, is so disorganized—when he is so confused—that he is incapable of thinking clearly; as, for example, on the platform immediately after the disappearance of the ghost, when he begins to talk wildly of performing impossibilities such as making a clean sweep from his mind of everything except his father's commands—one of which, by the by, he forthwith proceeds to break by speaking of his mother as a "most pernicious woman," forgetting the ghost's strict injunction:

"Taint not thy mind, nor let thy soul contrive  
Against thy mother aught."

And then he finds it meet to set down in his tables that it is possible for a villain to "smile and smile"—a platitude worthy of Polonius.

#### MADNESS IN SHAKESPEARIAN TRAGEDY

It is clear, in fact, that he is suffering from the effects of such a severe reaction after the awful strain of the interview with the ghost that, to all intents and purposes, he hardly knows what he is doing or saying: and when he tells his friends in all solemnity that he,

\* “perchance hereafter shall think meet  
To put an antic disposition on,”

they must have had some difficulty in repressing an inclination to smile at the unconscious irony in the remark; for he has just been affording them such a spectacular display of his “anticness” as to compel from the astounded Horatio the very pertinent exclamation:

“O day and night, but this is wondrous strange!”

And strange too, it may be observed incidentally, is it that this little speech of Hamlet’s—marked as it is by weakness and indecision and sterile at its birth of prospect of maturing into action—should ever have been accepted as earnest of intention to feign madness; and stranger still that it should be magnified into evidence of proof that he does so, in face of the fact that there is nothing in the text to warrant the belief that he did feign madness, or that he could have gained by doing so any help towards the accomplishment of his main object—or,

#### THE MENTALITY OF HAMLET

indeed, of any object. Finally—and not to labour the point too much—even if Hamlet had expressed a quite definite intention to feign madness, is there anyone, who has learned to know him sufficiently well to feel the charm of his delightful inconsequence, ready to believe that he will carry out this or any other intention except, perhaps, one formed without forethought and acted on without deliberation? May we not fairly find in his own words,

“Rashly,  
And praised be rashness for it, let us know,  
Our indiscretion sometime serves us well/  
When our deep plots do fail.”

the keynote of his general mode of action? Is not the whole play, in fact, largely a record of what he intended to do but did not, and of what he did not intend to do but did?

To return to the subject of Hamlet's attacks of mental confusion, it may be noticed that these spells, during which he appears bemused, spiritless, maundering, making remarks lacking in coherency and seemingly pointless, come upon him after some intensely exciting or terrifying mental experience; as for example, as we have seen, after the interview with the ghost on the platform, and again after the disappearance of the “ghost” in the closet scene with his mother, at which time his

## MADNESS IN SHAKESPEARIAN TRAGEDY

thoughts are obviously distorted and quite different from what one would expect from the "sane" Hamlet. [Thus he speaks of the Queen as being "sober" and "wise" when we know that his corrected judgement of her would be exactly the reverse.] Much, too, of what he says to his mother is marked by manifest incoherency. [The mere fact that he bids her good-night five times before he eventually makes his exit shows in what a jumble his mind is. Later in the play his speech to Laertes,

"What is the reason that you use me thus?  
I loved you ever: but it is no matter;  
Let Hercules himself do what he may,  
The cat will mew, the dog will have his day."

reveals not only confusion of thought but the strange fact that he seems to have forgotten that he killed Polonius. It would appear, also, either that he has forgotten or else has never realized that by breaking Ophelia's heart he was the cause, directly, of her lunacy and, indirectly, of her death.]

[But his worst attack of mental confusion is that in which he appears in Ophelia's closet; on which occasion he is apparently bereft of the proper use of his senses. His reason is in abeyance and his consciousness reduced to a minimum; [he has regressed to a primitive

## THE MENTALITY OF HAMLET

state of abject, childlike, uncontrolled terror; he is deprived of the power of speech, and he stands before her a trembling wretch with blanched face and piteous look, not knowing what he is doing, lost to his surroundings and to the world. At first he cannot recognize the girl he has loved so fondly—his “soul’s idol”—and only after a long perusal of her face is he able, like a man peering through a dense fog, dimly, vaguely, to identify the beautiful woman he is staring at, the imprint of whose features, one would think, might be stamped upon his brain.]

For the explanation of the immediate cause of this attack we have to rely largely on conjecture. In its most prominent feature—the exhibition of intense fear—it bears a marked resemblance to that which seized him after the disappearance of the “ghost” in the closet scene, when his state, as described by the Queen, is also one of terror, and it corresponds very closely to what may be seen in men whose minds have been rudely shaken by terrorizing experiences; in which cases, too, during an attack, consciousness is dimmed or obliterated. In this respect, also, it resembles the condition of Macbeth on several occasions; as when he cries out,

“How is’t with me, when every noise appals  
me?”

#### MADNESS IN SHAKESPEARIAN TRAGEDY

and at the hallucination of Banquo, when his terror is all but absolute. And so it seems to be a plausible conjecture that immediately before his entrance into Ophelia's closet Hamlet must have had some terrifying mental experience. It will not be forgotten that this thing happened to him after he had been enduring two months of terrible suffering—torments of remorse over his neglect to carry through "The important acting of" his father's "dread command," the bitter feeling of "the pangs of despised love," and the constant horror of the visualization of his adored mother

"In the rank sweat of an enseamed bed."

It is not surprising to learn that, thus distracted in mind, and as a consequence, no doubt, physically weak and ill, he had become so altered—so transformed—that

"Nor the exterior or the inward man  
Resembles that it was."

[With a man of Hamlet's unstable and highly sensitive nature a mental breakdown was only to be expected; and this seems to have happened. What the actual occurrence was that ushered in this terrible attack so graphically described by Ophelia is, and must remain, as has been said, a matter of conjecture. My own



## THE MENTALITY OF HAMLET

personal opinion, given for what it is worth, is that he had just had a visit from the ghost coming his "tardy son to chide"—not a real visit this time, but an hallucinatory one—a most appalling visitation, if it did come to him, and one that would fully account for his awful state of terror and subsequent remarkable behaviour.

There is another occasion on which it is pretty clear that Hamlet is having an attack of mental disorder. There seems to be no doubt, in fact, but that "Hamlet from himself" is "ta'en away" during the play scene: for it is incredible that he could, when in his right mind, besmirch his royal name and stain his noble character by insulting any young girl, much less the fair Ophelia, by the use of such coarse language as he addresses to her. This reason alone ought to be conclusive on the matter; but there are others. [It will be noticed that as the King, Queen, Ophelia and Polonius enter to take their seats for the performance, Hamlet, who had just been talking soberly and earnestly with Horatio about the coming play and the revelations he expected from it, gets excited. No doubt the sight, as they appeared to him, of these four people—the treacherous assassin, the incestuous mother, the girl who has broken faith with him and the interfering old fool—the authors of all his troubles—raised in his mind

*But for Hamlet's*

#### MADNESS IN SHAKESPEARIAN TRAGEDY

a storm which, in his overwrought condition, quickly brought on the attack in which his reason was overthrown, and the "nasty" side of him—who, after all, was only a poor human like ourselves—was shown up. It was so with Ophelia when she went mad. It was so with the mad Lear, whose speech, at times, was loathsome; and it is so with a great many people when they are insane: the acquired code of conduct is swept aside and instinctive nature asserts itself untrammelled by consideration for decency.

These are the principal instances of Hamlet's passing beyond the bounds of what is roughly—though perhaps sufficiently accurately for general purposes—known as sanity. During the whole play, however, his mind is in a state of high tension, high activity and productivity: whether it be of noble thoughts, as in his well-known speech addressed to his dearest friend,

"Horatio, thou art e'en as just a man . . ."

[Or of wit coloured by caustic humour, as in talking to Polonius, of open-hearted expressions of generosity in his warm welcome to the players, of the rather clever foolery of his playing with Osric, or of the sad reflections he gives way to when he tells Rosencrantz and Guildenstern that he has lost all his mirth and confides to them that the sky,



#### THE MENTALITY OF HAMLET

“this majestical roof fretted with golden fire, why, it appears no other thing to me than a foul and pestilent congregation of vapours.”

It is on this occasion, too, that he talks about his dreams in language whose fervour leaves no doubt of the terrible nature of these nightly visitations:

“O God, I could be bounded in a nut-shell and count myself a king of infinite space, were it not that I have bad dreams.”

Terrifying dreams, no doubt, in which probably—nay, almost certainly—the figure of a reproachful or even an angry father appeared to him; and dreams in which his mother, Ophelia, Claudius and others, mixed up in inextricable confusion, came to awaken him from an unrestful sleep—dreams in which the subjects of all his conflicting thoughts were presented to him in jumbled, distorted pictures, one of which he would appear to have in mind when he makes this curious, enigmatic remark to Rosencrantz:

“Then are our beggars bodies, and our monarchs and outstretched heroes the beggars’ shadows.”

a possible explanation of which is that he saw in a dream, in shadowy form, the dead

## MADNESS IN SHAKESPEARIAN TRAGEDY

body of Claudius dressed in beggars' rags; very much, in fact, as he would wish to see him.

Revenge

\* Finally, there remains for consideration the great problem of why Hamlet did not carry out his father's "dread command."

Hesitant  
Revenge

In view of the extensive literature that has already appeared on this subject, anyone may be excused for thinking that there is nothing more to be said about the matter. To mention one writer alone—Dr Bradley—anyone who has gone carefully through his lectures on Hamlet might very easily come to this conclusion. And yet the fact remains that the question keeps cropping up sporadically, and writers appear—contemplative men and scholars—who are evidently far from convinced that the correct solution has been found, and who feel that there was something else—something in Hamlet's mind—some mental force—some powerful resistance against doing the deed—a sort of mysterious power holding him back whenever he felt the urging to act—and that was pretty often. That there was such a counteracting influence present in his subconscious mind seems beyond all reasonable doubt. Hamlet himself was certainly aware of something of the kind, and was vastly puzzled to understand it. He had debated the matter pretty fully and had, one would think, made it perfectly clear to himself that it was his bounden

duty to carry out the ghost's instructions. He is full of self-reproach for not having done so. "Ere this," he tells us,

"I should have fatted all the region kites  
With this slave's offal; bloody, bawdy  
villain!  
Remorseless, treacherous, lecherous, kindless  
villain!"

He puts the case very clearly to Horatio:

"Does it not, think'st thee, stand me now upon,  
He that hath kill'd my king and whored my  
mother;  
Popp'd in between the election and my hopes;  
Thrown out his angle for my proper life,  
And with such cozenage—is't not perfect  
conscience,  
To quit him with this arm?"

To his mother he denounces the murderer—this "mildew'd ear"—in terms of the most vehement invective:

"A murderer and a villain;  
A slave that is not twentieth part the tithe  
Of your precedent lord; a vice of kings;  
A cutpurse of the empire and the rule,  
That from a shelf the precious diadem stole  
And put it in his pocket!"

One would think, in fact, that he had not only exhausted his vocabulary of vituperative terms but that there were no dark caverns of his mind left unexplored in his search for the crimes and

#### MADNESS IN SHAKESPEARIAN TRAGEDY

offences of his uncle. And yet there was one little transgression of this double-faced ruffian that Hamlet, somehow or other, omits to make mention of; although it is difficult to believe that he was not conscious of it. This unspeakable rascal—this “king of shreds and patches”—had supplanted him in the love of his adored mother. The passionate Queen, the hey-day of whose blood was not quite so tame as her guileless son imagined, had flown from her darling and given herself to his uncle,

“that incestuous and adulterate beast.”

The allurements of the serpent and the apple had slackened the bond of motherly love, and he was left with a mentality—never very robust—staggering from a blow delivered at its most vulnerable spot.

Did ever man have such provocation or such incentive to action as Hamlet? And yet he cannot act or explain the reason for his powerlessness. He can only descend on the humiliating confession:

“I do not know  
Why yet I live to say ‘this thing’s to do,’  
Sith I have cause, and will, and strength, and  
means,  
To do’t.”

Here then we are presented with a problem that really seems insoluble. It looks as if some

## THE MENTALITY OF HAMLET

invisible Prospero were present, placing a magic restraint on Hamlet's will-power and preventing him from carrying out his utmost wish, when apparently there was nothing whatever to stop him.

Haply it may help a little if we remember that there existed a similar "something" in Macbeth's mind when he decided to

"proceed no further in this business."

It is also interesting to note that *he* didn't know what "it" was. True he makes an effort to explain his attitude in the soliloquy:

"If it were done, when 'tis done . . ."

But his arguments, in which fear of consequences and tender regard for Duncan both appear side by side as alleged reasons—clearly incompatible—for holding his hand, fall flat and are of no value at all in helping us to discover the real "it" that was in his mind: and when we consider the tremendous efforts he, a man of blood and slaughter, had to put forth in order to overcome his resistance against doing the deed, and the terrible mental consequences to himself of the struggle to beat "it" down, we begin to realize that this little "it" may be a very big "it."

Brutus also was feeling "it," and though he does not or cannot tell us its nature, he gives

#### MADNESS IN SHAKESPEARIAN TRAGEDY

us a very clear notion of what "it" felt like in his little soliloquy:

"Between the action of a dreadful thing  
And the first motion, all the interim is  
Like a phantasma, or a hideous dream:  
The genius, and the mortal instruments,  
Are then in council; and the state of man,  
Like to a little kingdom, suffers then  
The nature of an insurrection."

From which description there can be no doubt of the disturbing effects of this "it."

What then is this mysterious "it" that caused so much perturbation to Macbeth and to Brutus and paralysed the will-power of Hamlet? From a careful study of the states of mind exhibited by these three characters, as deduced from their speeches, their behaviour and their general attitude in confronting the situation in each case, I have formed the opinion that the underlying mental condition was one of fear, *the nature and cause of which were unknown to the individuals*. It was a mysterious, uncanny feeling of fear, well described in Brutus' soliloquy as the sort of fear experienced in a "hideous dream" or nightmare. The result of my personal investigations into the minds of men who have had to face similar situations has not only confirmed my opinion that the condition is one of fear, but has, as it seems to me, thrown a good deal of light on the actual cause of this

## THE MENTALITY OF HAMLET

fear, and led me to the conclusion that in all these cases a very common, subconscious mental process known as identification takes place—that is to say, a process by which one person subconsciously identifies his own personality with that of another. It is a sort of mental projection which accomplishes, subconsciously, that which is implied in the familiar saying, “Put yourself in his place.” It is what happens when one, without realizing what he is doing, identifies himself with the hero in a play or in a novel. It is almost, if not quite, a necessary qualification of an actor that he should possess this power of identifying himself with the character he is playing. The process, too, occurs as an ever-present activity in the mind of the dramatist while he is creating a character. Shakespeare himself is the best example that can be given of one who perfectly identifies himself with his characters. The list of examples of cases of subconscious identification might be almost indefinitely extended if there were really any need to do so in order to establish a principle of the truth of which anyone can by careful introspection readily convince himself, and confirm by intimate talks with his friends. It was in my close conversations with persons who had been victims of fortune in being compelled to face propositions similar in the main factor to those presented to Macbeth, to Brutus



#### MADNESS IN SHAKESPEARIAN TRAGEDY

and to Hamlet that the presence of this process of identification revealed itself in them. The would-be slayer, before the acting of the dreadful thing, had, *in feeling*, unwittingly changed places with the victim, and in this way, when proceeding to take the life of another, he would be seized by a terrible fear very much akin to the instinctive dread—present in the subconscious of everyone—of passing suddenly into the unknown. It was the same kind of fear—"the dread of something after death"—that had, on previous occasions, puzzled Hamlet's will and made him bear the ills he had rather than fly to others that he knew not of.

The facility with which subconscious mental transposition takes place is not the same for everyone. Much depends on the person. In heavy-witted, stolid, self-centred, unemotional people it would happen imperfectly or not at all. It is in persons of strong sympathies, vivid imaginations, loving dispositions—persons of delicate mental structure, likely to break down under the stresses of baneful circumstances—that the process most readily occurs. Hamlet was almost ideally fashioned for the accomplishment of this act of mentally changing places with people. He had the power, and was constantly exercising it, subconsciously, of intimately associating himself with others. In Horatio he finds a man whom he can grapple



## THE MENTALITY OF HAMLET

to his soul with hoops of steel—an acceptable comrade to whom he addresses words whose fervour suggests the same kind of emotional feeling that drew David to Jonathan and inspired the sentiments of the *Sonnets*. The impassioned language in which he tells his friend,

“ Since my dear soul was mistress of her choice,  
And could of men distinguish, her election  
Hath seal'd thee for herself” :

and again,

“ Give me that man  
That is not passion's slave, and I will wear him  
In my heart's core, ay, in my heart of heart,  
As I do thee.”

attest the depth and intimacy of a love of unusual intensity. His greeting of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern is rich in the strong emotion of fervent friendship :

“ My excellent good friends ! How dost thou, Guildenstern ? Ah, Rosencrantz ! Good lads, how do ye both ? ”

And it is the same power of mental association that causes him to suspect some ulterior motive in their errand, and the same that reveals itself in the bounteous loving-kindness of his welcome to the players—the same that, except on certain occasions when he is mad, enables him to attach

#### MADNESS IN SHAKESPEARIAN TRAGEDY

himself in love and friendship to all who are worthy of it and to some who are not.

This subtle process of identification is also facilitated by any circumstances that tend to form an associative link between the principals. A deep contemplation of this speech of Claudius to Laertes will illustrate my meaning :

“ The queen, his mother  
Lives almost by his looks ; and for myself,  
She’s so conjunctive to my life and soul,  
That, as the star moves not but in his sphere,  
I could not but by her.”

The two men had this in common, that they both were worshippers at the shrine of the same goddess. And thus it comes about that whereas the conscious mind of Hamlet can find in Claudius only a loathed enemy, his subconscious blindly identifies his own personality with that of the lover of his mother.

It is in the same subconscious in which this so strange, subtle and, to some, almost incredible process of identification takes place that there dwells an ever-present, innate dread of the extinction of the Ego—a dread of the presence of which people are, for the most part, in their daily lives, happily unaware, but which rises into consciousness when conditioning circumstances bring it out.

## THE MENTALITY OF HAMLET

It is owing to the simultaneous occurrence in Hamlet's hypersensitive mind of the sub-conscious process of identification and of the dread of the extinction of the Ego that his will-power becomes paralysed—his thinking too precisely on the event,

“A thought, which, quarter'd, hath but one  
part wisdom,  
And ever three parts coward,”

no doubt contributing to determine his inactivity.

The type of insanity to which Hamlet's “madness” most nearly corresponds is that known as *manic-depressive*—a kind of varying mentality in which a person appears at times over-excited and at other times over-depressed, while he may or may not enjoy intervals of relative sanity, as Hamlet did. This type of insanity is, so to speak, modelled on mind as we find it in an ordinary individual. We are all apt to find ourselves in varying moods of elation or depression—frequently without being able to assign any cause for our particular mental state at a given time. Fortunately for the great majority of us the elevations and depressions from an arbitrary normal are not so pronounced as in the *manic-depressive*.

good for 11/12

It is not always easy to say in any particular case whether a person in whom states of exces-

#### MADNESS IN SHAKESPEARIAN TRAGEDY

sive elation and of profound depression appear periodically should be regarded as insane or not. Many poets exhibit like alternations of accentuated emotional states, generally falling short of *mania* on the one hand and *melancholia* on the other.

Did Shakespeare himself have these alternating periods? A comparison of *A Midsummer-Night's Dream* or, say, Falstaff with *Macbeth* or *King Lear* leaves very little doubt on the matter. In his vivid pictures of these opposite emotional states in Hamlet he is probably—nay, almost certainly—giving us a glimpse at a similar duality in his own personality.

## II

### MACBETH: A PARANOID

OF all Shakespeare's mad characters Macbeth is the most difficult to analyse. From the very beginning—long before he becomes a pronounced paranoiac—one suspects in him a substratum, a process in development, of mental disorder. His superstitious nature, his aloofness, his tendency to suspect ulterior motives and sinister designs in honest, straightforward people, his gloominess and lack of humour lend countenance to this view. Of the goodly supply of "the milk of human kindness" with which his wife credits him, but little, if any, is left in the altered Macbeth of our acquaintance. And this is just what we should expect to have happened. The deadly weed delusion in its growth soon kills the fair flowers generosity and loving-kindness. This decay of altruism in Macbeth is simply a symptom of his mental disorder. As time goes on he becomes more and more suspicious. Cunning and dissimulation — well - marked features of delusional states such as that into which he was drifting—while they serve as a

#### MADNESS IN SHAKESPEARIAN TRAGEDY

weapon of defence in his mental armamentarium, indicate at the same time a further distortion in his a-social personality. His general untrustworthiness becomes transparent at times. When he tells the witches,

“and to be king  
Stands not within the prospect of belief,”

we all know perfectly well that he is lying: for have not he and his wife been planning and scheming for some time how to get Duncan into their clutches in order to murder him and seize the throne? The scheme is ever present in his mind. Even when he is not thinking consciously about it, or playing with the prospect in fantasy, it is in his subconscious mind ready to pop into consciousness in response to the slightest incitement.

It would seem, too, as if of late some disturbing thoughts had been entering into his fantasies and contemplations of kingly power.

It is possible that, like Hamlet, he has been thinking too precisely on the event, and that on closer inspection the scheme has lost some of its attractiveness. In short, it would appear that a resistance “strong against the deed” is in process of formation in his turbulent mind. It is, in fact, the story of Hamlet’s tardiness over again, with modifications.

MACBETH: A PARANOIAC

Hamlet cannot do the deed at all: Macbeth has in him

“That which cries ‘Thus thou must do, if thou have it’;  
And that which rather thou dost fear to do,  
Than wishest should be undone.”

The conflict is between to do and not to do. That is the question for Macbeth. It is for him a fateful conflict, on the issue of which his future depends. It is accompanied by suppressed feelings of anxiety and fear, the first external manifestation of which occurs when the third witch, echoing his secret thoughts, makes the startling announcement:

“All hail, Macbeth! that shalt be king hereafter.”

To us who are in the secret it is not surprising to learn that he starts, and seems to fear “things that do sound so fair.” But Banquo, who knows none of these things, and who has seen him in the recent battle doing prodigious deeds of valour, must have felt more wonder than he showed at the sight of this super-warrior starting with fear at an old witch’s prophecy. But even we, who know something of the cause of Macbeth’s agitation, are not prepared to find him in such a parlous state as that in which he describes himself on learning that he



### MADNESS IN SHAKESPEARIAN TRAGEDY

is thane of Cawdor. The description he gives is that of a man in a state of extreme fear, exhibiting early signs of mental disorganization. His words, hardly needing ordinary explanatory commentary, are full of psychological value in view of developments:

“ I am thane of Cawdor :  
If good, why do I yield to that suggestion  
Whose horrid image doth unfix my hair,  
And make my seated heart knock at my ribs,  
Against the use of nature? Present fears  
Are less than horrible imaginings :  
My thought, whose murder yet is but fantastical,  
Shakes so my single state of man, that function  
Is smother'd in surmise, and nothing is,  
But what is not.”

He realizes himself that there is something seriously wrong with him, that in his mental functioning there is some strange distortion taking place, in consequence of which only things that have no existence appear to be real—a transient but ominous irregularity in his mental mechanism.

After this the fighting in his mind goes on with varying fortunes—the struggle between to do and not to do. It waxes and wanes. When he hears that Malcolm is to be prince of Cumberland it gets red-hot; while he mutters to himself:



MACBETH: A PARANOIAC

“ Stars, hide your fires !  
Let not light see my black and deep desires :  
The eye wink at the hand ; yet let that be  
Which the eye fears, when it is done, to see.”

A few hours later, in his own castle, he is tamely announcing to his “ dearest partner of greatness ” :

“ We will proceed no further in this business.”

The change in his mental attitude seems absolute. It represents an antithesis in mental functioning. A few short hours ago he was bloodthirsty, a would-be regicide, but now he is

“ weaker than a woman’s tear,  
Tamer than sleep.”

His resolution has failed him. He found it easier to view murder at a distance than he does to face it at close quarters. The pre-meditated murder of an aged king who stood to him more or less *in loco parentis* involves a deeper conflict. It is a similar conflict to that of Brutus and to that of Hamlet, and between Macbeth’s conflict and that of his wife there is a cousinly relationship. As soon as ever Macbeth yields to his wife’s persuasions he is a doomed man. His hallucination of the dagger ushers in a break-away from sanity — a stepping across the

#### MADNESS IN SHAKESPEARIAN TRAGEDY

borderland—an advance into the territory of the lost ones. His conflict has become so intense—so charged with affect, as we say—that it must find expression in symbolic form; and so the vision of the dagger is projected from his subconscious mind on to the screen of his consciousness. A companion case, not unknown to prospectors in the over-the-border land, is that of the man with impulses to cut his throat who sees before his face his razor dancing invitingly—the instrument he means to use when he can summon up courage to face the music.

As soon as Macbeth has done the deed there is no doubt but that he is in an agony of terror. We can picture him leaving the chamber of death, with the daggers in his hands, in a half-dazed condition, his mind all in confusion, hardly knowing how to get to his wife, creeping along with stealthy footsteps, looking over his shoulder every now and then to see if he is being followed, probably “hearing” the footsteps of a pursuer and a threatening “voice” execrating him for his dire deed of sacrilege. And so in his unbearable fear he shouts:

“Who’s there? What, ho?”

He rushes in to his wife and whispers hoarsely:

“I have done the deed.”

MACBETH: A PARANOIAC

After which he continues in the same strain as before:

“ Didst thou not hear a noise? ”

No doubt he heard it, and when he cries “ Hark! ” he is probably hearing it again. His account of what he heard while on his way from Duncan’s bedroom may have been a true description of actual occurrences or he may have been hallucinating; it is impossible to say. It is more likely than not that the word “ murder ” was hallucinated because his mind was exactly in a condition at the moment to hallucinate a voice speaking the word. But when he goes on to inform his wife,

“ Methought I heard a voice cry ‘ Sleep no more !

Macbeth does murder sleep ! ’ ”

there is no reasonable doubt as to what had been happening to him. He not only thought he heard the voice, but he did hear it—as plainly as if someone were actually saying the words. It seems probable that the voice he was hearing was the hallucinated voice of Duncan coming to avenge his unholy murder. The voice, too, was heard not once only, but frequently and loudly, so that, as it seemed to Macbeth, it could be heard all over the house.

MADNESS IN SHAKESPEARIAN TRAGEDY

“ Still it cried, ‘ Sleep no more!’ to all the  
house:  
‘ Glamis hath murder’d sleep, and therefore  
Cawdor  
Shall sleep no more: Macbeth shall sleep  
no more!’ ”

It is not surprising that the man is terror-stricken. An auditory hallucination is often an awe-inspiring happening, causing an intense, uncanny feeling of fear. It is always the expression in consciousness of the content of a mental conflict, and the acuteness of the fear is—as we say in mathematics—directly proportional to the severity of the conflict. Macbeth’s conflict is as the torture of a soul on fire. It was bad enough before the murder, but now it is ten times worse. There is the blood on his hand—the “filthy witness” of his crime. There is still the ringing of that dreadful voice, which, no doubt, his superstitious mind kept telling him came from lips not mortal. His awful feelings of guilt and the agonies of remorse are testing the limits of his powers of endurance. One wonders if in this hour of desolation some flashes of recollection of his own wonderful words come back to him:

“ And pity, like a naked new-born babe,  
Striding the blast, or heaven’s cherubin,  
hors’d

MACBETH: A PARANOIAC

Upon the sightless couriers of the air,  
Shall blow the horrid deed in every eye,  
That tears shall drown the wind."

It is not possible to think of Macbeth at this time as being sane; but, on the other hand, he is not hopelessly mad. In fact there is just a chance that he might recover if he could only get some rest for his distracted mind. But this was not to be. No sooner has his wife left him to take back the daggers than other troubles appear. He hears the *Knocking within*, and a fresh attack of fear, like the fear of death, holds him in grip.

"How is't with me, when every noise appals  
me?"

he cries out, almost beside himself. And then a terrible thing happens. He sees two mysterious hands appearing in front of him. The hands commence to clutch at his eyes. He can feel them at work on his eyes trying to tear them out. The surprising thing is that he is able to speak at all, but he manages to call out:

"What hands are here? Ha! They pluck out  
mine eyes."

Then his attention is attracted to his own blood-stained hand, and he asks appealingly, and with a note of despair in his voice:

MADNESS IN SHAKESPEARIAN TRAGEDY

"Will all great Neptune's ocean wash this blood  
Clean from my hand?"

And whose were these hands that Macbeth saw? Of course it is impossible to say for certain; but it is almost certain that they were hallucinated hands of Duncan, appearing as a sort of visual reproach or protest

"against  
The deep damnation of his taking off,"

coming, as it were, to perform a retaliatory act by plucking out the eyes of the man who drove a dagger into the heart of his king and benefactor as he lay helpless in sleep. Similar hallucinations are a fairly frequent experience of men who are suffering the bitterness of unavailing remorse for having taken human life, unjustifiably — as it appeared to them. The "ghost"—that is, the hallucination—of the slaughtered man or of his revengeful face, aggressive hands, and so forth, "comes back to plague the inventor."

As the *Knocking within* continues, and the scene closes on the doomed couple, it may be supposed that Macbeth's concluding words,

"Wake Duncan with thy knocking: I would  
thou couldst,"

express Lady Macbeth's as well as his own sentiments.

It would seem as if Shakespeare, when he

#### MACBETH: A PARANOIAC

seizes on a character to make him the victim, or hero, of one of his great tragedies, never gives him any peace day or night, but pursues him with relentless cruelty, with an artistic refinement of torture. Whom the gods wish to destroy they first drive mad. And it must be confessed that Shakespeare, in playing the rôle of a god or demigod in this respect leaves no room for adverse criticism on the score of efficiency of treatment. It was so with Macbeth. It was so with Othello. It was so with Lear. It was so almost equally, though in a way not so strikingly evident, with Hamlet. At any rate he destroyed them all, and drove them "mad" first—Macbeth and Lear absolutely, Othello at the end, and Hamlet not quite so obviously, and by a more gradual process, with intervals of comparative sanity.

But to return to Macbeth. The manner in which he conducts himself during the trying scene after the arrival of Macduff, Lennox and Banquo is remarkable, and would seem more so unless it is remembered that fear acts in two ways. It may make a man a coward, if he yields to it, or a hero, if he overcomes it. During this scene Macbeth becomes temporarily reinstated in his character as hero. By a tremendous effort of will he faces the music, and by an almost incredible display of bluff carries the situation through.



#### MADNESS IN SHAKESPEARIAN TRAGEDY

During his absence for the ceremony of the coronation Macbeth was getting madder than ever. The *Deus* has been seeing to this. A condition such as that in which we have seen him immediately after the murder—seeing things that are not there and hearing voices that have no existence except in his mind—is one from which a quick recovery is impossible, and which practically always gets worse. These hallucinations, especially the voices, do not leave a man in a hurry, and it may be taken for granted that Macbeth, from the time he sets out from his castle for Scone until he finds himself in the Palace, crowned King of Scotland, has had many terrifying mental experiences. A slight acquaintance with the ways of disordered minds might enable one beforehand to predict this confidently, but there is no need for predictions or conjectures. He tells us himself of the horrors he has been going through :

“ But let the frame of things disjoint, both the  
worlds suffer,  
Ere we will eat our meal in fear, and sleep  
In the affliction of these terrible dreams,  
That shake us nightly; better be with the dead,  
Whom we, to gain our peace, have sent to  
peace,  
Than on the torture of the mind to lie  
In restless ecstasy.”



· MACBETH: A PARANOIAC

A terrible picture of a mind tortured into madness by intolerable conflicts, but not more terrible than might safely be looked for if we remember that Macbeth was once a kind-hearted man, and that he has been urged on, against his better nature, by circumstance, to murder after murder. He has already committed three, and has just arranged for two more.

At this time a terrible thought—of a delusional or superstitious nature—comes to him. He is evidently captured by a belief, intrinsically diabolical but acting as a sort of palliative to his diseased mind, that when Banquo and Fleance are dead his troubles will vanish as if by magic. He has come to regard their deaths in the light of a sacrificial offering for his redemption from the mental punishment he is receiving. When they are dead he will be able to eat his meal in peace and sleep the sleep of a care-free man. This remarkable delusion—that by killing another, one may get rid of his own affliction—is unusual, but by no means unknown among lunatics. As may readily be believed, it makes its owner a very dangerous man, especially when, as in Macbeth's case, it is associated with other dangerous delusions.

The strange and terrifying experiences of Macbeth at the banquet were very much what one might expect to happen on the hypothesis

#### MADNESS IN SHAKESPEARIAN TRAGEDY

that the "ghost" of Banquo was no ghost at all, but a visual hallucination. For in the first place his mind, containing as it does the very conflict out of which such an hallucination would be projected, is primed for this eventuality; and secondly, his behaviour, as apart from his speech, corresponds exactly to what our experience teaches us does happen to a man in the act of hallucinating the content of an intolerable conflict. The man is terrified. He is lost to his surroundings. Time and locality have no place in his mind. He is living in and for the hallucination only, and is quite insensible to all external happenings. So it is with Macbeth. He sees the "ghost" of Banquo and nothing else.

"Prithee, see there! behold! look! lo! how say you?"

he shouts in terror, regardless of the presence of his guests. His surroundings have no existence for him at the time, and fear takes possession of him entirely. By the splitting of his personality he is not only cut off from external influences but is deprived of all conscious control over himself. It would seem, then, that when Shakespeare is putting Banquo on the stage as a "real live ghost," in order to provide a "thrill" for his audience, he at the same time means Macbeth's mental condition

to be that of a man experiencing a visual hallucination in which his mind is completely, or almost completely, absorbed. This attempt of the dramatist to conform his dramatic requirements to psychological conditions must be regarded as being only partially successful. In his mind there are contending interests, dramatic and psychological, but inasmuch as he is writing a play, and not a treatise on psychology, the lesser interest is sacrificed to the urgency of fulfilling a dramatic necessity; and so he credits Macbeth with the power of conscious utterance, of which he would under the circumstances have been incapable. It goes without saying that Shakespeare was quite aware of this discrepancy. He was "up against" an impossible situation, in which, as the dramatic artist on the one hand and as a psychologist on the other, he found himself in conflict.

He sacrifices his psychology to his art.

In other respects than that of his being more conscious than is possible under the circumstances the description of Macbeth's behaviour during the banquet scene is psychologically correct. After the terrifying hallucinations he does not quickly return to full consciousness, but talks as if his guests were not there. He expresses astonishment that Lady Macbeth was not afraid of the ghost.

## MADNESS IN SHAKESPEARIAN TRAGEDY

“ You make me strange  
Even to the disposition that I owe,  
When now I think you can behold such  
sights,  
And keep the natural ruby of your cheeks,  
When mine are blanched with fear,”

— he tells her — not understanding, of course, that she could not see it. After the guests have gone he wanders on musingly, and not very coherently. The after-effects of hallucination are often of this nature. Gradually he is coming to himself and remembers that Macduff did not obey his summons to appear at Court. He gives an important clue to the actual delusion that has got hold of him when he lets out the secret :

“ There’s not one of them, but in his house  
I keep a servant fee’d.”

X From which no doubt remains not only of Macbeth’s insanity but of the actual form of mental disorder with which he was afflicted. He was a paranoiac of the worst and most dangerous type, a man suffering from delusions of persecution with homicidal tendencies. He will kill anyone or everyone that his deluded mind causes him to regard as his enemy. He will kill them not because he is particularly fond of killing but as an act of self-defence,

## MACBETH: A PARANOIAC

because he believes that they mean to kill him. Fear is evidently the principal motive power influencing him, but he is also a prey to suspicion, hesitation, and doubt as to his course of action; and so he will go to consult the witches. His last words to Lady Macbeth, before setting out, are very significant:

“We are yet but young in deed.”

He means having more blood.

Beyond emphasizing the strong blend of superstition in Macbeth's character, the whole of the witch scene adds little to what we have already learned about his mentality. In fact the apparitions themselves, though of varying, are, on the whole, of mild psychological interest. Thus the apparition of the armed head is of little psychological significance, because although he may have had, and probably did have, some premonitions of death by violence, he could hardly have had foresight of his own head being cut off by Macduff, or by anyone else. For a similar reason the apparition of the bloody child has no meaning for Macbeth because he had no knowledge of Macduff's mode of birth. That of the crowned child may have found representation in his mind in the form of a conflict: for the sorrow of his own childlessness weighs heavily on him. And the thought of anyone else succeeding to the

#### MADNESS IN SHAKESPEARIAN TRAGEDY

throne that he had gained at such terrible cost was intolerable; so that this "apparition" may have been an hallucinatory output of his own mind rather than an objective reality. The apparition of the eight kings is of purely historical and dramatic interest, whereas that of Banquo may have been an apparition, "ghost" or hallucination; it depends on the way the dramatist means it to be taken.

If Macbeth's emotional state during his interview with the witches be compared with that which he displays at the banquet the contrast is very striking. In the banquet scene he "loses his head" completely. His personality becomes dissociated; his reason has gone and he is terrified, whereas towards the apparitions his attitude is for the most part critical—until Banquo appears; then it becomes emotional: the sight of the crown sears his eyeballs.

It would seem, then, that this witch scene is, on the whole, of dramatic rather than psychological interest, and we have referred to it, partly at least, because it illustrates very clearly the distinction between an apparition and an hallucination.

Apparitions are creations of the poet's imagination, in which he "bodies forth the forms of things unknown," and shapes them to the order of his own mind just as he does in his



#### MACBETH: A PARANOIAC

poetical creations. Hallucinations are the subjective outputs of the minds of characters he is delineating.

About Macbeth's mental condition, or rather about the thoughts in his mind immediately after his interview with the witches, there is no necessity for conjecture. He tells us very plainly in an aside:

“Time, thou anticipat'st my dread exploits:  
The flighty purpose never is o'ertook,  
Unless the deed go with it: from this moment  
The very firstlings of my heart shall be  
The firstlings of my hand. And even now,  
To crown my thoughts with acts, be it thought  
and done,  
The castle of Macduff I will surprise;  
Seize upon Fife; give to the edge o' the  
sword  
His wife, his babes, and all unfortunate souls  
That trace him in his line. No boasting like  
a fool;  
This deed I'll do, before this purpose cool:  
But no more sights!”

From which it is perfectly obvious that the lust of blood is upon him, and that he is the victim of what is popularly known as homicidal mania. Henceforward he will have neither pity nor remorse; he will have no more hallucinations—“no more sights.” So he believes and determines.

## MADNESS IN SHAKESPEARIAN TRAGEDY

A homicidal paranoiac is not a nice man to meet under any circumstances. He is, in fact, one of the most dangerous lunatics that society has to deal with. He is filled with fear of, and hatred for, his fellow-man, and obsessed with the belief that this latter feeling is reciprocated. He believes that people are plotting to kill him; hence he will frustrate their plans by killing them. As may readily be supposed, when he appears in the rôle of king, nobody's life is safe; and so it was with Macbeth. From the accounts we hear of him during the few weeks that intervened between the meeting with the witches and his next appearance on the stage, in the room of the castle of Dunsinane, his rule appears to have been nothing short of a reign of terror:

“Each new morn,  
New widows howl, new orphans cry; new  
sorrows  
Strike heaven on the face, that it resounds  
As if it felt with Scotland, and yell'd out  
Like syllable of dolour.”

So Macduff tells us in the course of that strange duologue between himself and Malcolm in a country lane in England, and while he is yet unaware that his wife and children, all his

“pretty chickens, and their dam,  
At one fell swoop,”



#### MACBETH: A PARANOIAC

have been sacrificed as victims to the madman's rage, and fear, and thirst for blood. Later on we learn from Caithness:

“ Great Dunsinane he strongly fortifies :  
Some say he's mad ; others, that less hate  
him,  
Do call it valiant fury : but, for certain,  
He cannot buckle his distemper'd cause  
Within the belt of rule.”

After all this — after his terrible mental attacks of hallucinations and delusions of persecution, after he has been wading through blood and slaughter in the unrestrained fury of his madness—it is small wonder that Macbeth, deserted by most of his followers, shut up in the castle of Dunsinane, which is now closely invested by the enemy, with the finger of doom pointing at him, should feel the fear of a condemned criminal, should present an attitude similar to that of a wild beast at bay—the difference being that the animal, unlearned in modes of concealing his feelings, exhibits undisguised symptoms of fear, and often rage, whereas Macbeth exerts all his powers of reason, all such powers of control as are left to him, to conceal from himself and others his state of badly suppressed terror. He would lean for such support as they were worth on the prophecies of the witches, and protests to the doctor and the attendants:

MADNESS IN SHAKESPEARIAN TRAGEDY

“ Till Birnam Wood remove to Dunsinane,  
I cannot taint with fear. . . .  
Fear not, Macbeth; no man that's born of  
woman  
Shall e'er have power upon thee.”

And then, half believing, or trying to believe,  
in the genuineness of his protestations he struts  
and frets and brags in “ Ercles vein ”:

“ The mind I sway by, and the heart I bear,  
Shall never sag with doubt, nor shake with  
fear.”

The state of wild terror into which he is  
thrown on the entrance of the officer, evidently  
also in a state of fright, shows how much value  
is to be attached to his braggadocio:

“ The devil damn thee black, thou cream-  
faced loon!  
Where got'st thou that goose look? ”

he shouts, and at the officer's report:

“ There is ten thousand——”  
“ Geese, villain? ”

he exclaims, and on being informed, “ Soldiers,  
sir,” his rage and terror become boundless, and  
are expressed in unmeasured terms of abuse:

“ Go, prick thy face, and over-red thy fear,  
Thou lily-liver'd boy. What soldiers, patch?  
Death of thy soul! those linen cheeks of thine  
Are counsellors to fear.”

MACBETH: A PARANOIAC

It is interesting to note how often Macbeth in the few lines quoted uses the word "fear," and how he would project into the mind of another the fear that is in his own. But when the officer leaves him, seemingly oblivious of the presence of the doctor and attendants, he discloses the pitiful content of his mind:

"Seyton!—I am sick at heart,  
When I behold—Seyton, I say!—this push  
Will cheer me ever, or dis-seat me now.  
I have lived long enough: my way of life  
Is fall'n into the sear, and yellow leaf;  
And that which should accompany old age,  
As honour, love, obedience, troops of friends,  
I must not look to have; but, in their stead,  
Curses, not loud, but deep, mouth-honour,  
    breath,  
Which the poor heart would fain deny, and  
    dare not."

Here he is not only laying bare the content of his conscious mind, but is giving us a peep at the nature of the underlying conflicts that are largely responsible for his state of mental disorder. As he sees himself, he is not only friendless and unloved, but reviled and execrated of men. Just at this time, overwhelmed by his fears of imminent disaster and by the stresses of his conflicts, he becomes acutely confused. He will hasten to put on his armour notwithstanding Seyton's assurance that the time has

#### MADNESS IN SHAKESPEARIAN TRAGEDY

not yet come for the need of doing this. He asks the doctor how his patient, Lady Macbeth, is going on, and hearing that her trouble is also mental, makes an appeal to him in terms that evince not so much concern for her as they reflect the sorrow of his soul for which he seeks relief. In the well-known passage,

“ Canst thou not minister to a mind diseased ;  
Pluck from the memory a rooted sorrow ;  
Raze out the written troubles of the brain ;  
And, with some sweet oblivious antidote,  
Cleanse the stuff'd bosom of that perilous  
stuff  
Which weighs upon the heart? ”

he is crying out for relief from his own mental tortures without much, if any, thought for hers. In the mentally disordered person there is no altruism: there is no concern but for self. The waters of affection, of love, of every feeling and emotion that tend to elevate man and shut out from him the lower cravings and urgings of his instinctive nature, have flowed away, and left him a soulless derelict with the wreckage of a shattered mind, a prey to all that is primitive and utterly selfish in the natural man.

His state of terror and mental confusion progresses. He will put on his armour and, talking wildly to the doctor, imploring relief

MACBETH: A PARANOIAC

from his mental suffering, throws it off again, making such a noise in the performance that in reply to his question concerning the English,

“Hear'st thou of them?”

the doctor answers with a touch of humour:

“Ay, my good lord; your royal preparation  
Makes us hear something.”

It seems hardly necessary to emphasize the fact that in these, as in the succeeding scenes in which Macbeth in bombastic fashion lays claim to the possession of an unconquerable soul, he is trying to conceal in the very thinnest of disguises his unconquerable fear: even at times he abandons the effort. He is becoming apathetic. His emotions are getting dulled. At the announcement of his wife's death he shows hardly any interest:

“She should have died hereafter,”

he remarks with callous indifference, and then gives way to reflections that show into what depths of pessimism and despair he has sunk:

“To-morrow, and to-morrow, and to-morrow,  
Creeps in this petty pace from day to day,  
To the last syllable of recorded time;  
And all our yesterdays have lighted fools  
The way to dusty death. Out, out, brief  
candle!”

#### MADNESS IN SHAKESPEARIAN TRAGEDY

Life's but a walking shadow; a poor player,  
That struts and frets his hour upon the stage,  
And then is heard no more: it is a tale  
Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury,  
Signifying nothing."

It sounds like the last words of a dying philosopher who is tired of life and has no incentive or wish to live any longer. In reality it is the cry of one on whom the knowledge is being enforced that his doom is sealed, and who is preparing with the best grace he can to accept the inevitable. Macbeth doesn't want to die. He is a drowning Macbeth who would still grasp at the straws of the witches' prophecies. But every time his hopes revive he is met by a fresh disappointment. The news that Birnam Wood is really moving to Dunsinane excites him for the moment to a fresh call to arms, but the thought passes in its inception. He ends in a wailing bathos:

"I 'gin to be a-weary of the sun,  
And wish th'estate o' the world were now  
undone";

from which he again ascends with tiresome iteration to utter a fresh note of defiance and a determination to die with harness on his back.

When we consider Macbeth's state of chronic fear; its exacerbations in the form of attacks

## MACBETH: A PARANOIAC

of extreme terror; their frequent occurrence, coming so quickly one after the other that hardly is one attack over before he is seized with another; when, as he tells us,

“They have tied me to a stake; I cannot fly,  
But, bear-like, I must fight the course,”

the account of his fight with the young Siward, in which the latter is slain, may seem surprising. It may appear probable that Macbeth, notwithstanding his determination to fight, will fail, as he so often does, to keep up his courage, especially now that he has to face a positive danger. His courage, however, is the courage of despair, and many of us are familiar—some of us too familiar—with the fact that men who would be only too glad to run away in the presence of what seems certain death, can put up a good fight when there is no other alternative. So it was with Macbeth, who, further fortified by the assurance that he could not be slain by “Man that’s of a woman born,” brings his career of bloodshed to a finish in his victory over the young man who thus “paid a soldier’s debt.”

Still relying on the witches’ last prophecy—based upon the slender fiction that a child is not born of woman because he is “from his mother’s womb untimely ripped”—he tries to pluck up courage for his last encounter; but



#### MADNESS IN SHAKESPEARIAN TRAGEDY

on hearing from Macduff the circumstances of his birth, he at first refuses the contest. Compelled by necessity to put up a show of fighting, he becomes an easy prey to the sword of the man whose wife and children have fallen as a sacrificial offering on the altar of his deluded mind. Similar sacrifices to men's passions, suspicions and delusions are all too common to-day. It may be that there is something of the Macbeth latent, deeply hidden, more or less strongly repressed, in the unconscious minds of most of us—if not of all of us—far more than we think.

If, now, we consider the inter-relationship of Macbeth's insanity and his behaviour, the conclusions seem clear enough. His mental conflicts previous to the murder and the tortures of remorse for having done the deed determine his insanity. His insanity, once established (delusions of persecution), is responsible for his subsequent career of bloodshed.



### III

#### THE TEMPORARY INSANITY OF OTHELLO

IN contrast with our somewhat scanty information concerning the histories and characters of Hamlet, Macbeth and Lear before the plays in which they appear commence, we get to know quite a lot about Othello. Thus we learn from Iago that

“The Moor is of a free and open nature,  
That thinks men honest that but seem to  
be so,  
And will as tenderly be led by the nose,  
As asses are.”

—a judgement which, if due allowance be made for Iago’s coarse vivacity in mode of expression, is substantially correct.

By the same authority we are informed that

“The Moor—howbeit that I endure him not—  
Is of a constant, loving, noble nature.”

This, too, in a soliloquy, and therefore presumably a genuine expression of opinion, seems to be a sound judgement in fact. For many valuable details we are indebted to Othello himself. Thus he tells us :

#### MADNESS IN SHAKESPEARIAN TRAGEDY

“ Rude am I in my speech,  
And little bless'd with the soft phrase of peace ” ;

and further, that his life from early years, until he came to Venice some nine months before we are introduced to him, was passed among his own folk, a simple, warlike people, living in tents, so that he knew but “ little of this great world.” A hard life too, which, while it but ill fitted him to meet the more complex life of Venice, had left him practically a broken-down man—a man “ declined into the vale of years,” in whom “ the young affects ” were “ defunct ”—a man rendered prematurely old, in great part owing to the stresses of his war experiences :

“ Of moving accidents by flood and field :  
Of hair-breadth 'scapes i' th' imminent  
deadly breach ;  
Of being taken by the insolent foe,  
And sold to slavery ” ;

—in short, a man altogether unfit to be the husband of a beautiful, lively and accomplished young woman like Desdemona, and most unlikely to be able to adjust himself to the highly civilized and cultured society of Venice. As a matter of fact the whole situation was an impossible one for Othello. It was impossible for him to adjust himself to the social life or even to the society life of Venice, still less to

#### THE TEMPORARY INSANITY OF OTHELLO

the circumstances attendant on his marriage; so that, even without the intervention of Iago, with his amiable disposition and delicate suggestions, such a marriage was foredoomed to failure:

“ She lov’d me for the dangers I had pass’d;  
And I lov’d her that she did pity them.”

What sort of continued married happiness was to be expected from that kind of love, even if other things had been more equal? The answer is “none.” Many disproportions in mating may be adjusted or readjusted under the influence of a mutual sublimated love, but not those that obtained in the case of Desdemona and Othello. Even the passionate outpourings of his soul,

“ If it were now to die,  
’Twere now to be most happy; for, I fear,  
My soul hath her content so absolute,  
That not another comfort like to this  
Succeeds in unknown fate.”

and the responsive fervency of Desdemona’s prayer,

“ The heavens forbid  
But that our loves and comforts should increase,  
Even as our days do grow!”

fail to carry conviction of the likelihood of the perdurance of their love.

#### MADNESS IN SHAKESPEARIAN TRAGEDY

In this very beautiful expression of Othello's, of soul-satisfying content in his love, enhanced as it is in power of appeal to our higher feelings and emotions by its presentation in words of exalted poetical fervour, it seems ungracious to find a deep psychological meaning; but the cruel demands of truth are inexorable, and compel us to read into his words an unconscious defence against an uneasy and unacknowledged feeling of failure. It would seem as if, in order to hide from himself this insistent feeling, he uses extravagant language expressive of a happiness which he so fondly desires and would fain believe to be his. Haply he deludes himself, like the hero in Browning's *The Last Ride Together*, into accepting an insubstantial fantasy as an adequate substitute for reality, and represses a prophetic vision of a dreaded realization which in vague, indefinite form flashed before his mind's eye as a cold and soulless apparition. He would fondly shut his eyes to facts, and make a supreme effort to crystallize a life's happiness into the ecstasy of a perfervid, passing rapture. He would accept an ephemeral idealistic fantasy in exchange for a durable, realistic entwining of souls which, in his heart of heart, he feels to be impossible; and so, in his superlative expression of happiness in his love, methinks he did "protest too much." Nor can there be any doubt of the unsufficing

THE TEMPORARY INSANITY OF OTHELLO

nature of the love relations between Desdemona and Othello; for we have it from herself on the one hand,

“ I saw Othello’s visage in his mind ;  
And to his honours, and his valiant parts,  
Did I my soul and fortunes consecrate,”

and from Othello on the other,

“ Vouch with me, heaven, I therefore beg it  
not,  
To please the palate of my appetite :  
Nor to comply with heat (the young affects  
In me defunct) and proper satisfaction ;  
But to be free and bounteous to her mind.”

Truly, there is not much of the Romeo and Juliet, or of the Ferdinand and Miranda, in all this. Such love-making would cause Paolo and Francesca to wonder what ’twas all about.

It is important to note that Othello himself, before he met Desdemona, had no wish or intention to get married :

“ for know, Iago,  
But that I love the gentle Desdemona,  
I would not my unhousèd free condition  
Put into circumscription and confine  
For the sea’s worth.”

Important, too, from a psychological viewpoint, is it not to overlook the wealth of meaning in the simple phrase, “ the *gentle* Desdemona.” It was her gentle sympathy,

#### MADNESS IN SHAKESPEARIAN TRAGEDY

a possession almost peculiar to woman, and strongly marked in Desdemona, that appealed especially to Othello. His consciousness of a shattered manhood would fondly find compensation for his waning powers, and seek a haven of refuge in the sheltering bosom of his gentle love. One is irresistibly reminded of Browning writing of Pauline:

“ thy sweet eyes,  
And loosened hair, and breathing lips, and  
arms  
Drawing me to thee—these build up a screen  
To shut me in with thee, and from all fear,  
So that I might unlock the sleepless brood  
Of fancies from my soul, their lurking place.”

This unfitness of Othello for married life and his dawning consciousness of the fact had, as it was bound to have in anyone so circumstanced, a powerful influence as a force tending to unbalance his mind.

Another disability Othello was suffering from was that due to his colour. In the words, “Haply, for I am black,” he gives vent to the pent-up affects and emotions arising out of a painful self-consciousness of his black skin. Consider the mental injury he must have felt under the dreadful insults of Brabantio. Imagine how he must have quivered when the epithet “foul thief” was hurled against him. Think what restraint he must have exercised

#### THE TEMPORARY INSANITY OF OTHELLO

when he had to meet, with an apparent outward calm, such an expression as "the sooty bosom of such a thing as thou"—a man, too, who fetched his "life and being from men of royal siege." Nor were the well-meant efforts of the Duke to smooth matters over at all calculated to assuage the storm that must have raged in Othello's mind as the result of conflicting emotions. The advice to Brabantio, "Take up this mangled matter at the best," however well intended by the Duke, was about as soothing to Othello as would be the application of a blister to a raw sore. There is no need to labour the subject. Its importance rests almost altogether in the fact that, in Othello's mind, his blackness aroused a feeling of inferiority. In his relation to Desdemona this was perceived by him as an added disability, and gave rise to a mental conflict, tending further to aggravate a growing unrest. It is, in fact, very evident that, without the trouble arising out of his love affair, Othello already had plenty of whips and scorns to bear up against. To this proud, simple, truthful man of untutored mind the difficulties in the way of adjusting himself to the complex society of Venice, of maintaining an external calm in the face of insults, covert and open, added to the anxiety necessarily attached to his military responsibilities, must have been well-nigh



#### MADNESS IN SHAKESPEARIAN TRAGEDY

insuperable; and yet they were as nothing compared to those he had to contend against after his marriage with Desdemona. So that when Iago appeared on the scene he found in front of him a comparatively easy task; for the mind of Othello, handicapped as he was by an originally rather poor mental equipment, by his colour, age, war-weariness and impaired powers of manhood, was already in a tottery state. In fact it would seem that Shakespeare was almost supererogatory, except for dramatic purposes, in bringing in the services, for what was really a simple task, of one so exquisitely refined in the art of suggestion as that perverted and grim humorist, Iago.

A goodly number of opinions, which it would be out of place to discuss here, have been advanced as to the character and mentality of Iago. For the present we must be content to regard him as the agent in the play for bringing about the overthrow of a mind full of conflicting thoughts and emotions. The explosive charges were ready. He was the spark that set them off. He was the *Diabolus ex machinâ*, the evil god brought in to complete a debacle in place of a beneficent power introduced to save the situation.

The question of Othello's behaviour, however, in murdering Desdemona is not quite so easily settled as it might appear to be, even

#### THE TEMPORARY INSANITY OF OTHELLO

after a full consideration of his disabilities, and of the influence of Iago in urging him on to the murder. It would seem that Othello, or any other man, would have required far more than hearsay evidence of Desdemona's supposed guilt before making up his mind to kill her. There have been plenty of men who have committed suicide, or made determined attempts to do so, owing to premature loss of virility; but murder is a different matter. And the vile insinuations and accusations of Iago, unsupported by positive evidence, although enough to arouse jealousy, seem inadequate to account for Othello's extreme action in killing the one woman whom he worshipped. And such a woman too! In short, it would seem that there must have been in Othello's mind some determining force over and above his consciousness of failure to fulfil his marital obligations, and independent of Iago's "medicine." A solution of the problem may be found, perhaps, in the fascinating personality of Desdemona—in her attraction for others, as well as for Othello: for Desdemona was no ordinary woman. She was, in fact, one of those somewhat rare specimens of womankind whose love flows out to the whole world, and is very often reciprocated by men, and, indeed, by women too.

Emilia, not less than Roderigo, lost her life

#### MADNESS IN SHAKESPEARIAN TRAGEDY

through devotion to this great-hearted, loving soul—this child of nature, who understood not the limitations of her generosity, and whose great universal love was bounded and held in restraint only by the high standard of her idealism. Of infinite pity, too, was this gentle lady, who could bestow the inestimable treasure of her hand where, as she began to discover too late, it was impossible for her to give her heart—a state of affairs foreshadowed in her own words:

“ I saw Othello’s visage in his mind;  
And to his honours, and his valiant parts,  
Did I my soul and fortunes consecrate,”

—a woman whose scarcely conscious impulses to love became all too manifest to the abnormally sharpened perceptions of another not less great soul, whose devotion to his love object was thwarted by his unfortunate condition, and narrowed by a vision that could not see beyond or through the barrier of his rapidly growing delusion. And here we are confronted with a situation illustrating a mode of erroneous reasoning of very widespread occurrence. People who, like Othello, begin to entertain suspicions of anyone are apt to misinterpret the behaviour of the object of their suspicions and to find in their minor actions, in expressions let fall innocently, in

## THE TEMPORARY INSANITY OF OTHELLO

symbolic gestures of unconscious origin, meanings confirming their suspicions. And so the poor Moor read into the consciously innocent behaviour of Desdemona meanings that had no place in her conscious mind. She was young and romantic. She tried to persuade herself that esteem and pity were an equivalent for love, and she failed in the attempt. To Othello's deluded mind she became a whore, not because she was a whore, but that "she loved much." Her mind, like that of many a beautiful, attractive and altogether lovable young woman, was largely hidden from herself. But it is not difficult to read between the lines and find evidence that she was already half repenting of her black bargain, and brooding in fantasies which she was trying hard, but in vain, to repress:

" 'Let nobody blame him ; his scorn I approve,'  
Nay, that's not next. . . .  
' I call'd my love false love ; but what said  
he then?  
Sing willow, willow, willow :  
If I court moe women, you'll couch with  
moe men.' "

She was improvising in the song and giving expression to her fantasies—her concealed and hitherto unexpressed broodings or day-dreams—and projecting the content of these on to her husband, changing places with him, as it were.

#### MADNESS IN SHAKESPEARIAN TRAGEDY

And in her conversation with that smart, witty, humorous and practical young lady, Emilia—in her protestations of fidelity—she was obviously protesting too much, and was disclosing the contents of an inner mind of one

“Of spirit so still and quiet that her motion  
Blush’d at herself.”

There were in fact in Desdemona’s subconscious mind, as there are in the minds of thousands of virtuous women, thoughts, feelings, desires—repressed because they are inconsistent with their idealistic standards. Such internal conflicts betray themselves, unconsciously, in demonstrations of affection quite compatible with chastity in conduct. These demonstrations pass uncriticized by the uncritical, although they are in reality symbolical of subconscious trends of thought that, for a closely attentive and jealous observer, carry confirmation of his suspicions. Nor is he altogether wrong in his conclusions; but the mistake he makes is in ascribing conscious, intentional motive to uttered expressions and to demonstrations symbolical of instinctive impulses. In this way and to this extent the Moor misread Desdemona’s behaviour, and translated her emotional demonstrativeness into evidences of a guilty liaison.

Much stress has been laid from time to time

#### THE TEMPORARY INSANITY OF OTHELLO

by various writers on the exceptional chastity of Desdemona—so much so as to leave an impression that in some undefined way the quality of the chastity of other virtuous women fails to reach the same level of excellence in purity as that of Desdemona's, the fact being, of course, that she was neither more chaste nor less chaste than thousands of good girls, and—she was human. She was, for example, neither more nor less chaste than Ophelia, and we know the sort of love fantasies that this refined, cultured and altogether charming lady had been playing with; for when an attack of *acute mania* obliterated her reasoning powers, tore off the mask of conventionality, deprived her of her powers of control and let loose the then unrepressed workings of her subconscious mind, she gave expression to her day-dreams of love for the one man whom she had long worn in her heart's core in love songs, the utterance of which, when she was sane, would have been revolting to her proper notions of behaviour and, in fact, would have been impossible.

If I have dwelt at too great seeming length on the mentality of Desdemona, my reason for doing so is, as I have indicated, because of the manner in which her over-loving generosity was perceived by Othello, and of the reacting effect on his mind. So that, while his deluded mentality prevented him from discerning the

#### MADNESS IN SHAKESPEARIAN TRAGEDY

falseness of Iago's accusations, his perceptions, sharpened in other respects, caused him to find in her demonstrative behaviour the presence of emotional impulses of the nature of which she herself was unaware. States of mind like that of Othello's are constantly met with among paranoiacs, or persons suffering from delusional insanity. They interpret correctly the hidden unintentional meaning of behaviour in speech and conduct, but draw inferences which are not borne out by fact. They observe closely, too, and not only fit in their observations by interpreting them to confirm their suspicions, but rake up past events and adapt these to their service in like manner. In this way, no doubt, it occurred to Othello that Desdemona's conduct in leaving her father's house secretly, and consenting to a clandestine marriage, was somewhat *risqué*. Was this young lady in the habit of committing indiscretions? Apparently it was her father's custom to keep a watch on her, for when he finds Roderigo's story of her disappearance to be correct, he expresses not more surprise at her imprudence than curiosity to learn how she got out:

“O heaven!—How got she out?—O, treason of the blood!”

Again, was Othello acquainted with a contemporary proverb, “The first handsome



#### THE TEMPORARY INSANITY OF OTHELLO

woman that ever was made was made of Venice glass," and did he recall Brabantio's parting shot:

"Look to her, Moor, if thou hast eyes to see:  
She has deceiv'd her father, and may thee."

Apparently Iago's information,

"In Venice they do let heaven see the pranks  
They dare not show their husbands,"

was new to Othello, but, if so, he must have been a man of little curiosity in these matters, for if only he had looked around carefully, we have it on trustworthy authority that he would have found no difficulty in verifying the statement; and we know from that most amusing young woman, Iago's wife, that her own virtue had its limitations bounded by "this heavenly light" and material considerations. Nor were there wanting other indications and incidents tending to arouse or confirm Othello's suspicions. A casual remark of Desdemona's,

"What! Michael Cassio,  
That came a-wooing with you,"

let fall playfully, was a nasty dig for him.

The affair of the handkerchief, to a man in Othello's perturbed state, was a big matter, illustrating

#### MADNESS IN SHAKESPEARIAN TRAGEDY

“What dire offence from am’rous causes  
springs,  
What mighty contests rise from trivial  
things.”

These, and his growing introspection, aided by the insinuations, suggestions and lies of Iago, all contributed to the one end.

Nor can Othello’s assurance earlier in the play,

“Nor from mine own weak merits will I draw  
The smallest fear, or doubt of her revolt;  
For she had eyes, and chose me.”

be accepted at its face-value. The words simply point to an effort on his part to repress his growing doubts of Desdemona’s chastity. His protestations of belief are, being interpreted, but proofs of rising suspicions.

To take up and examine, one by one, the changes occurring in Othello’s mind under the dexterous manipulation and growing influence of Iago would be tedious and largely unnecessary. The story as set forth in the text is, for the most part, simple enough. The devil-work of Iago consisted in nurturing the growth of a mental conflict which in embryo, or rather in process of maturation, was already there. His deadly medicine was doing its work effectively. A crisis occurs when, discarding mere insinuation, he frankly proclaims

## THE TEMPORARY INSANITY OF OTHELLO

Desdemona's act of adultery with Cassio. The breaking stress is reached, and Othello falls down in a fit. The raging storm of his contending emotions—the struggle between eruptive forces in the form of intolerable thoughts on the one hand, and the desperate mental efforts to subdue or repress these thoughts on the other—rend his mind in twain. His consciousness leaves him and he “falls in a trance” at the feet of Iago.

In his description of this fit Shakespeare paints in very vivid colouring the struggles of a soul on fire to escape out of its burning tortures. He shows the gradual process by which the mind passes from consciousness through incoherence into a condition of unconsciousness. From the first words, “Lie with her!” which are quite coherent, to the last, “Noses, ears and lips.—Is it possible?—Confess!—Handkerchief!—O devil!” there is to be observed a gradually increasing incoherence—a progressive jumble as well as a want of apparent logical sequence of thoughts, accompanied by a proportionate waning of consciousness, until there is none left and all is dark. The first words are spoken consciously. Those following become gradually more and more the expressions of his subconscious—the products of his conflicts, that is, of the unbearable thoughts repressed into his

subconscious mind — thoughts which he had struggled so hard to forget. Notwithstanding the apparent incoherence every word is of significance and has definite meaning. “Lie with her! lie on her!” (coherent). “We say, lie on her, when they belie her. Lie with her! Zounds, that’s fulsome!” (commencing confusion). “Handkerchief — confessions — handkerchief!” (commencing incoherence. In popular language, “getting mixed”). “To confess and be hanged for his labour.” (Referring to Cassio, of course.) “First, to be hanged, and then to confess.” (Equivalent to “hang him first and try him afterwards.”) “I tremble at it.” (An expression of fear always present in similar circumstances.) “Nature would not invest herself in such shadowing fashion.” (All is becoming blurred and dark. This always happens in like conditions.) “Without some instruction.” (A superstitious, uncanny feeling of the presence of some supernormal agency — very often present in these cases.) “It is not words that shake me thus.” (No, he was probably having a visual hallucination, the content of which was based on Iago’s account of Cassio’s dream.) “Pish! Noses, ears and lips.” (The same thing; he was “The supervisor” grossly gaping on.) “Is’t possible?” (Iago’s expression after Othello’s lament ending “Othello’s occupation’s gone.”) “Confess?—

Handkerchief?—O devil! ” And then the fit. And what is this fit? It is a desperate effort of the mind to rid itself of intolerable thoughts by fading or swooning into unconsciousness—by taking refuge in Nirvana, if only for a brief space of time. It is the realization of a wish to forget—a universal longing, as it seems to me, common to all mankind ; for there must be few of us who would not willingly forget at times, and long for the peace of unconsciousness.

My interpretation of the nature of Othello's fit and of the causes leading up to it are not based on mere conjecture, hypothesis or imagination. The explanation is not evolved from what is popularly known as my “inner consciousness”—whatever that may mean—but rests on the solid foundation of experience, not of isolated cases, but of many. The mode of production of all these outbursts of emotion, these so-called hysterical fits, follows a uniform plan. Thoughts, unpleasant memories, feelings, emotions, unpermissible or unattainable desires—mental processes that man is ashamed to think of, or hates to think of, or is afraid to think of, he consciously or unawares tries to lose sight of. He bottles them up under pressure and they take on the character of an explosive charge. When the charge explodes, the manifestations show in various ways—for example, in hallucinations, as with Macbeth;

#### MADNESS IN SHAKESPEARIAN TRAGEDY

in a sudden attack of acute mania, as with Ophelia; or in a "fit," as with Othello.

In his numbed, confused, mental condition after the "fit" Othello becomes a piece of plasticine for the artist in suggestion to mould according to his will. He is rapidly becoming a subdued, a beaten man. But even before the fit he was showing marked signs of mental deterioration as apart from his growing delusional state. He was exhibiting a loss of confidence in his ability to stand up against fortune's buffets. In those wonderful lines, as affecting as a *requiem*, he pours forth his soul in an anthem of despair:

"O, now, forever  
Farewell the tranquil mind! farewell content!  
Farewell the plumed troop, and the big  
wars . . ."

And if we remember that this is the same man who, recalling scenes of former glory, could declare with modesty and truth,

"I have seen the day  
That, with this little arm and this good sword,  
I have made my way through more impediments  
Than twenty times your stop,"

the contrast is so obvious as to leave no doubt but that Othello was a broken man who had practically lived his life and almost fulfilled

## THE TEMPORARY INSANITY OF OTHELLO

his destiny, but who, like many men, most of us probably, did not care to realize the fact that man, looked at from one aspect at any rate, is a piece of machinery that must become worn out—comparatively soon if the wear and tear is too great, but in any case at the termination of the period it was built to last.

But the old spirit, though sleeping to a dying condition, has still energy for a semi-final outburst that gives us a glimpse of what Othello must have been like in his best fighting days:

“Villain, be sure thou prove my love a  
whore, . . .  
Or, by the worth of man’s eternal soul,  
Thou hadst been better have been born a  
dog,  
Than answer my wak’d wrath.”

During this reactionary storm of rage Iago must have had a narrow escape of his life. But the fury of the Moor was quickly spent, and soon he passed again under the spell of the master mind of Iago.

Here it will be well to consider more closely than has hitherto been possible the exact valuation of Iago as a power instrumental in determining the trend of Othello’s mentation. It has been pointed out that the receptive state of the mind of the Moor has as much to do with his credulity as had the cunning of Iago’s well-selected suggestions. In order to



#### MADNESS IN SHAKESPEARIAN TRAGEDY

be convinced of the truth of this opinion one has only to consider, for example, what would have happened if, in the early days of their honeymoon, suggestions had been made to Benedict that Beatrice was unchaste. I fancy Signor Montanto would have made short work of the accuser.

Still, for all that, it is impossible to doubt but that Iago's psychological importance, considered as a factor in shaping Othello's mind, is considerable. To be more precise, his exact psychological value lies in this, that his insinuations and accusations were so framed as to harmonize—if one may use the term—to be in accord, to fit in accurately with possibilities, or even probabilities, as matters presented themselves to the awakening realization by Othello that he was an utterly unsuitable husband for Desdemona; that a big mistake, unfortunately irrevocable, had been made, and that "to be free and bounteous to her mind" was but a poor substitute for the impassioned love that is the glorious privilege of youth, and, even then, only when a mutual sex-attraction is fortified and nourished by

"The worship the heart lifts above,  
The heavens reject not."

Iago's principal work was to hurry up matters and precipitate to a crisis a state of affairs which,

#### THE TEMPORARY INSANITY OF OTHELLO

in this prosaic age, and after weary months or even years of mutual hating of an ill-matched couple, would probably have terminated in the divorce court. It is true that it was Iago who started the immediate trouble by sowing the seeds of jealousy in Othello's mind, and who afterwards nourished them to exuberant growth; but it is equally true that unless the soil had been suitable the seeds would never have taken root, but would have perished in the act of sowing. Othello's mind was the "good ground" for growing Iago's poison-producing seeds. It seems hardly necessary to elaborate this view any further, or to attempt to strengthen it by additional argument. It may, however, be interesting, not only from the point of view of laying bare the depths of Iago's villainy, and of showing how his well-directed shafts struck at Othello's weakest points, but also of illustrating Shakespeare's unequalled powers of penetrating deeply into the human mind, of holding the mirror up to nature and exposing with horrifying fidelity unsuspected strata of unedifying and repellent material (thoughts that, happily, culture and refinement in general manage to throw a veil over); it may be interesting, I say, to make clear the deep meaning of one of the most deadly blows dealt by Iago to his unfortunate victim. It was like the blow of a

penetrating shaft that sinks deep and leaves a wound of a particularly painful nature and very difficult to heal. This death-thrust is to be found in the following passage spoken by Iago:

“Ay, there’s the point:—as,—to be bold with  
 you,—  
 Not to affect many proposed matches  
 Of her own clime, complexion, and degree.  
 Whereto, we see, in all things nature tends,—  
 Foh! one may smell in such a will most rank,  
 Foul disproportion, thoughts unnatural.”

In this passage Iago almost excels himself. Mephisto could go no lower. Compared to this, Edmund shows up as a passable character and Don John as a decent member of society. For, note Iago’s meaning. He is conveying to Othello the idea that Desdemona’s love was nothing better than desire—and perverted at that. And further, observe the full effect on Othello of this thunderbolt. It shattered at once his love idyll, replaced a fantasy of love as simple and innocent as that of *The Cottar’s Saturday Night* by a picture redolent of the orgies of the brothel, and it offered a convincing reason for the flight of Desdemona to the arms of a more ardent lover than himself. Himself! a poor, broken-down, elderly, black man who had nothing in the way of love to offer but “to be free and bounteous to her

#### THE TEMPORARY INSANITY OF OTHELLO

mind." On a mind such as Othello's, already torn by conflicts, the wound left by such a blow as this was deep, terribly painful and abiding. The horrible thought, as a revived memory, kept constantly flashing into consciousness and torturing the man. An incident in the murder scene makes this clear. Othello tells Desdemona to think on her sins, and she replies, "They are the loves I bear to you." When he whips out the terrible retort, "Ay, and for that thou diest," he is thinking of Iago's

"Foul disproportion, thoughts unnatural,"

while Desdemona, poor girl -- who will say what thoughts were in her mind in her hour of agony? Was she still trying to find Othello's visage in his mind, or was she contemplating her shattered ideal? Did memories of the many proposed matches which she had rejected come to mingle with the horror of the thoughts of her impending death? Who shall say?

To enter into and analyse the effects of all Iago's poisoned shafts on the mind of Othello would carry us beyond prescribed limits, and, in view of what has been written, should be unnecessary. It is open to the reader, without special experience in abnormal psychology, to follow the text and find in Iago's ingenious selection of well-directed deadly blows, meeting the mark every time, fresh tortures for Othello

#### MADNESS IN SHAKESPEARIAN TRAGEDY

—to watch the Moor writhing in the grip of his tormentor, and to realize that the wounds inflicted did not heal or cease to pain.

In the case of a person passing from a state of relative sanity into one of insanity the transition may take place suddenly or slowly, by almost imperceptible degrees. As a rule the delusional condition comes on gradually, and is not complete or fixed for some considerable time. In order to meet the requirements of Shakespearian tragedy those heroes of his who eventually become insanely deluded make the journey to over-the-border land rapidly, and their progress is still further hastened by the administration to them of a series of timely buffets—each buffet, by increasing the disorder in their minds, sending them farther along the path leading to their destination. This increasing mental disturbance is quite apparent in Othello as a result of his buffetings. It becomes unmistakably noticeable during and after his fit, as an after-effect of which his mind is left clouded, weakened and less capable of standing up against further blows of fortune. It is while he is in this mentally enfeebled, defenceless state that a series of blows begins to rain in on him, commencing with the little by-play cunningly staged by Iago for the Moor's benefit, and with the avowed object of driving him mad.

#### THE TEMPORARY INSANITY OF OTHELLO

Then come on in quick succession the news of his recall, his supersession by Cassio, Desdemona's unfortunate remark delivered with fatal simplicity,

“ I would do much  
To atone them, for the love I bear to Cassio.”

and, finally, his assault on his wife. The unfortunate man is not given a chance. Before he has time to recover from the effects of one blow he becomes the recipient of another. The resulting confusion in his mind, as he goes on addressing alternately the weeping Desdemona and her horrified kinsman, Lodovico, is revealed in his speech:

“ Proceed you in your tears.—  
Concerning this, sir,—O well-painted passion!—  
I am commanded home.—Get you away;  
I'll send for you anon.—Sir, I obey the mandate,  
And will return to Venice.—Hence, avaunt!  
Cassio shall have my place. And, sir, to-night,  
I do entreat that we may sup together:  
You are welcome, sir, to Cyprus.—Goats and  
monkeys!”

In addition to the confusion one may note a double meaning and a grim, mad irony in the words, “ Cassio shall have my place,” for Desdemona has to die this night to expiate her supposed “ Goats and monkeys” tricks with Cassio.

#### MADNESS IN SHAKESPEARIAN TRAGEDY

It is not surprising that Lodovico, on witnessing Othello's assault on Desdemona and then hearing the "Goats and monkeys" remark, should be puzzled and gravely inquire:

"Are his wits safe? is he not light of brain?"

Practically the same problem that presented itself to Lodovico for solution confronts us to-day—Was Othello insane at the time? The question of sanity or insanity is a relative one. The border of demarcation is broad and ill-defined. It may be safely said, however, that his awful mental turmoils, storms of passion, weakening of judgement, mental confusion, loss of control of his emotions and his seemingly unshakable belief—in spite of Emilia's evidence and his wife's manifestly sincere and vehement denials—point to a condition of mind far removed from sanity, while the murder of Desdemona was the act of a person who was mad at the time. His reawakening, when at last light is borne in on him, makes it clear that he was only temporarily insane. If his delusion had been fixed, no amount of evidence could have shaken it. His disillusionment (I should like to coin "de-delusioning") came too late.

The despairing lament of Othello, expressed in the words,

"Who can control his fate?"



THE TEMPORARY INSANITY OF OTHELLO

is the valediction of a man beaten by his mental conflicts and no longer capable of meeting the calls of the realities of life.

His rose has withered, his life-energy is gone—the young affects defunct. If he had gone on living it is highly probable that he would have become permanently insane.

## IV

### THE MANIA OF LEAR

It is not a little remarkable that a play which has been held by many distinguished Shakespearean scholars to be the dramatist's greatest work should have for its principal character an old man who had arrived at that time of life at which the strength of men is but labour and sorrow—when an exit from the stage of life would be more in accordance with the usual sequence of events than an entrance on the stage of a theatre in the character of a hero.

More than ever at such a time does it seem fitting that a man should die quietly—should

“ Cease upon the midnight with no pain ”

when his mental faculties begin to fail, when his reason and judgement are showing well-marked signs of impairment and are no longer capable of keeping his impulses and emotions under becoming control.

That such was the case with Lear the most casual reading of the distribution scene will convince one; and, this being so, the question might well be asked: “ What is the *raison d'être* ”

## THE MANIA OF LEAR

for his living any longer?" The only answer that suggests itself is that he may fulfil a *motif* of a Shakespearian tragedy by being put on the rack of an attack of madness before his death. }

The tragedy of Lear is not in his death, but in the terrible mental sufferings he had to endure before the "necessary end," culminating in a more than usually severe attack of *mania*, of the oncoming of which he had such alarming premonitions: }

"O, let me not be mad, not mad, sweet heaven! Keep me in temper: I would not be mad!"

And again:

"I prithee, daughter, do not make me mad!"

And just before he goes out into the storm:

"O fool; I shall go mad!"

It has been argued that Lear was mad from the very beginning, but, in the absence of any general agreement as to the meaning to be attached to the word "mad," it is evident that a discussion on this point might quite easily degenerate into a battle of words—a tiresome logomachy. We are all agreed that he became mad before his death; but with regard to his early condition when first he comes on the stage,

all one is justified in saying, I think, is that his natural mental shortcomings had become more pronounced in his old age. Always an over-generous man, he became more generous than ever. Always a rash and hasty man, he became more rash and hasty. His reasoning powers and judgement, never very good, had deteriorated; and his fiery temper, never under proper control, had become almost ungovernable. In addition to this he was clearly entering upon that "last stage of all . . . of second childishness"; for indeed this display of his in his public announcement of the division of his kingdom was hardly more than a little dramatic performance in disguise, bearing a strong resemblance to a make-believe play of an imaginative child—though unfortunately in this case the *dénouement* falsified his expectation of a happy ending.

The truth is that, at the time the play begins, Lear was mentally on the down-grade—was exhibiting signs of a progressive mental decrepitude disproportionate to his physical state of well-being. It is unusual to describe such a condition as "madness," but if it is decided to do so, it should be clearly understood that this kind of "madness" is very different, indeed, from that which subsequently took possession of him and held him in grip as an out-and-out maniac. Still, even in this early part of the play

## THE MANIA OF LEAR

(Acts I. and II.), there are clear indications, if not of actual madness, certainly of on-coming trouble—trumpets of prophecy proclaiming danger in the aforementioned premonitions and in the extreme violence of his uncontrolled emotional outbursts. These and the shock of his daughters' atrocious behaviour to him provided ample material for the production of mental conflict of the degree of severity likely to cause, in persons of neurotic disposition, symptoms of gross mental disorder such as hallucinations, delusions, maniacal excitement, attacks of depression, mental confusion and so forth. In fact in a mind such as Lear's, ill-prepared as it was, owing to its native instability, to resist the buffets of fortune, and further weakened by the deteriorating influence of years, such blows as he was receiving one after the other were bound to give rise to a series of terrible conflicts, resulting in more or less complete mental overthrow. His limit of tolerance was reached on the night when he went out into the storm; and in a short time—a matter of hours—after the doors of Gloucester's castle were closed upon him, his reason became seriously disordered and he was insane.

It will be interesting, and indeed necessary, if we are to understand how Lear's final mental overthrow came about, to think precisely on the workings of his mind during the storm. A

close study of his speeches will help us a good deal in this matter. From these, and in the light of subsequent happenings, it may be taken that there were in his mind two main disturbing trends of thought—namely, that concerning his treatment by his daughters and the fear of going mad.

That his mind should be worked into a state of ferment by the constantly recurring recollections of these two terrible women was inevitable. It seems probable, too, that his intellectually weakened and emotionally quickened mentality was perceiving these memory-pictures as visualizations so exceedingly vivid as greatly to enhance the realistic effect of their presentation to him. Such maddening images appearing in the mind of the old king—now liable at any moment to break out in an attack of *acute mania*—were becoming intolerable. There was the persistent picture of Goneril, with her cold, fearless, determined expression. He could "hear" her denouncing in scathing terms the excesses of his knights and squires:

“ Men so disorder'd, so debosh'd and bold,  
That this our court, infected with their  
manners,  
Shows like a riotous inn: epicurism and  
lust  
Make it more like a tavern, or a brothel,  
Than a graced palace.”

can  
remember

## THE MANIA OF LEAR

The almost audible reproduction of her insulting threat,

“be, then, desired  
By her, that else will take the thing she begs,  
A little to disquantity your train,”

Lear Remembers



filled him with impotent rage.

He could see himself, a beaten man, standing before this seemingly emotionless woman, destitute of gratitude and affection. He could feel himself smarting under the lash of her pitiless tongue—himself, Lear, the autocrat, the king, hedged in by divinity; and, worse still, he could feel himself afraid of her as she stood and faced him without anyone to fall back on for support. And so he hated her. His mental picture of Regan was somewhat different. He saw in her a daughter equally ungrateful, equally cruel and rather more so, in whom courage was replaced by treachery. Goneril had the courage to fight her own battles, to stand up against him, alone and unafraid. In the absence of some support to fall back upon, Regan would have been unable to face her angered and outraged father. The old king knew it; and so, while he hated Goneril and feared her, he hated Regan and contemned her. It is not surprising that these re-iterant pictures of his two rebellious daughters should have distorted the mind of Lear into a shape

Fear Goneril  
2 Fear Regan

} 3



#### MADNESS IN SHAKESPEARIAN TRAGEDY

beyond recognition of its own self of the happier days when he reigned in the undisturbed serenity of unquestioned authority. It is not surprising that he sought refuge in the unruly elements to find distraction from his unendurable thoughts. At times, with the assistance of the storm, he was successful in getting rid of these; but only for a brief period, when the dread recollections would come again.

But no mind, and certainly not one like that of Lear, can become the seat of such terrible conflicting thoughts and emotions without injury to itself; and so, in the end, the old king begins to throw out signals of distress. He would give up the struggle and let his thoughts wander in any direction in which, haply, he might find relief. In this mood he wanders on to sorrowful reflections on the sufferings, in such weather as this, of poor, half-starved, almost naked, houseless wretches, and into self-reproaches for having so thoughtlessly neglected in the past these poor creatures—his own subjects—for so many years. Not exactly a dreamland paradise of contemplation in which to obtain peace of mind one would imagine, but infinitely better than the intolerable thoughts of his treatment by his daughters, and a refuge, however temporary, from his almost overpowering terror of impending insanity. At any rate this digression of Lear's brought to him something approaching

## THE MANIA OF LEAR

a feeling of relative comfort for the time; and anyone who has followed with sympathy the dreadful sufferings of the old man can hardly fail to entertain a passing wish that, at the least, he may be granted an extension of respite from torture. But no! The demands of Shakespearian tragedy are inexorable, and its requirements are imperative that the victim must be made mad before he is utterly destroyed.

To this end the series of events immediately following all contribute. The first of these, the sudden and startling appearance of Edgar in his Tom o' Bedlam attire, appears to bring about a crisis in Lear's mind—to determine the moment of his transition into definite insanity. His first words on seeing Edgar reveal the fact that his reason is overthrown. The situation, so to speak, fitted itself to his conflicts and apprehensions, and he finds in Edgar's mad appearance and forlorn condition something that he closely associates with his own mental and bodily state. Semi-consciously his worst fears are realized. Edgar is clearly mad, and therefore he must be mad too. His own daughters have driven him mad, and therefore Edgar's daughters must have driven their father mad also. Strange reasoning to be sure, but typical of the *non-sequitur* deductions proceeding out of the disorderly working of a madman's mind. His excitement becomes intense.

Rowe & Smith  
Audience with  
3 Types of Shakes  
game,  
(or, maybe)

- Book quote

MADNESS IN SHAKESPEARIAN TRAGEDY

“ Didst thou give all to thy two daughters?  
And art thou come to this? ”

he crics; and Edgar's wild reply only serves to confirm his suspicions.

“ What, have his daughters brought him to this pass?  
Couldst thou save nothing? Didst thou give them all! ”

he exclaims with growing excitement; and then:

“ Now, all the plagues, that in the pendulous air  
Hang fated o'er men's faults, light on thy daughters! ”

The remark of Kent,

“ He hath no daughters, sir,”

is received with incredulity, and only serves to increase his wrath.

“ Death, traitor! nothing could have subdued  
nature  
To such a lowness, but his unkind daughters! ”

he shouts; and then he begins to grow calmer as his interest in Edgar increases. But it is only a lull before the storm. He must be, *he will be*, as Edgar is; and so, to complete the likeness, he tears off his clothes and stands there in the blinding storm, a poor, bare, forked animal—mad, mad, mad!

## THE MANIA OF LEAR

His personality now becomes dissociated. He is in a state very much like that of a hypnotized person. For the time being Edgar becomes his world. Otherwise his senses are shut to his surroundings. For him the storm does not exist. The entrance of Gloucester passes unobserved. The earl's fearful news,

“ His daughters seek his death,”

comes to deaf ears. Edgar is his philosopher, his learned Theban (a joke?) his good Athenian (a promotion). Nothing will induce him to enter the hovel unless his newly found affinity goes with him.

When they reach the farmhouse his personality is still dissociated, but the split-off portion of his mind is no longer engaged with Edgar. It is taken up with fantasies of recollections of his pernicious daughters. The fool's question as to whether a madman be a gentleman or a yeoman arouses his attention for the moment and directs it to himself.

“ A king, a king! ”

he exclaims, with a touch of that curious insight some of the insane have into their own mental condition; and then he lets loose the content of his conflicts in a way that shows how his mind has been working. He wants revenge. He wants

MADNESS IN SHAKESPEARIAN TRAGEDY

“To have a thousand with red burning spits  
Come hissing in upon 'em.”

The trial scene that follows illustrates in a remarkable way the mental workings and behaviour of a person the functions of whose sense organs are wholly or partly in abeyance, and who is living through scenes in which his surroundings have for him become obscured or have vanished altogether. His mind has abrogated its normal functioning and is engaged in a sort of dream-work. The people around him have lost their identity and become other persons. He is “seeing” the content of his mental conflicts projected before him, but he is not seeing them with his eyes. His “eyes are open but their sense is shut.”

When Edgar says,

“Look, where he stands and glares!”

Lear is having a “vision.” He is probably hallucinating one or both of his pernicious daughters—his disturbed appearance calling forth Kent’s appeal to him to lie down and rest:

“How do you, sir? Stand you not so amazed:  
Will you lie down and rest upon the cushions?”

But Lear is engaged in his own work of making arrangements for the trial, and scarcely

THE MANIA OF LEAR

notices the interruption. When all is ready the trial commences :

LEAR : Arraign her first ; 'tis Goneril. I here take my oath before this honourable assembly, she kicked the poor king her father.

FOOL : Come hither, mistress. Is your name Goneril ?

LEAR : She cannot deny it.

FOOL : Cry you merey, I took you for a joint-stool.

Lear was " seeing " Goneril standing on or close to the joint-stool (like a prisoner awaiting trial) in the same way as that in which Macbeth saw Banquo sitting in an empty chair. Then the hallucination vanishes and is replaced by one of Regan :

" And here's another, whose warp'd looks  
proclaim

What store her heart is made on.—Stop her  
there !

Arms, arms, sword, fire !—Corruption in the  
place !

False justicer, why hast thou let her 'scape ? "

The contrast between his hallucination of Goneril and that of Regan is of the greatest psychological interest. He sees them in hallucination as he would expect to see them in reality : Goneril, cold, defiant, with " frontlet on " and unafraid ; Regan running away in fear.

MADNESS IN SHAKESPEARIAN TRAGEDY

The scene again changes, and his mind jumps back to happier days. He sees his favourite dogs and hears them barking (visual and auditory hallucinations):

“ The little dogs and all,  
Tray, Blanch, and Sweetheart, see, they bark  
at me.”

And then, as the vision vanishes, the thought of Regan (possibly an old association with the dogs) raises him to a pitch of fury, in which he shouts:

“ Then let him anatomize Regan; see what breeds about her heart. Is there any cause in nature that makes these hard hearts?”

And in a moment all is forgotten. The king, calm once more, turns to the ragged Edgar and in all gravity remarks:

“ You, sir, I entertain for one of my hundred; only I do not like the fashion of your garments. You will say they are Persian attire; but let them be changed.”

Excellent humour; but of course quite unconscious.

And now the old king is exhausted. Tortured into madness by his daughters' devilish cruelties, and battered by exposure to the fury of the pitiless storms, he succumbs. He lacks the season



## THE MANIA OF LEAR

of all natures, sleep. A good long sleep might restore his bodily strength for the time, and even help his badly shattered mentality to somewhat recover its balance. In sleep, the

“Balm of hurt minds, great nature’s second  
course,  
Chief nourisher in life’s feast,”

lies his only chance of recovery. He is too tired to eat. He longs for sleep and whispers to Kent :

“Make no noise, make no noise; draw the  
curtains: so, so, so: we’ll go to supper i’ the  
morning: so, so, so.”

And so he goes to sleep. “Oppressed nature  
sleeps.”

But this will not suit the aim of the *deus*. Lear is wearied and mad. He must be made more wearied and madder. To this end events have to be shaped. The object is effected by bringing Gloucester on the scene, bearing the terrible news that there is “a plot of death upon” the king. The circumstances do not admit of delay. He must be aroused at once and hurried off to Dover in order to escape from the she-devils, his daughters, who are now seeking his life.

When next we hear of Lear several days have slipped by; and during the interval an immense alteration has taken place in his

MADNESS IN SHAKESPEARIAN TRAGEDY


mentality. His condition of mania has disappeared and he is now in a state almost corresponding to dementia. His wild excitement has gone, but all his mental faculties are badly damaged. His intellect is clouded, his memory is seriously impaired, and there are signs that he may soon be becoming childish again. Kent tells us something about him:

“ Well, sir, the poor distress’d Lear’s i’ the town ;  
Who sometime, in his better tune, remembers  
What we are come about, and by no means  
Will yield to see his daughter,”

because

“ A sovereign shame so elbows him.”

The stupendous efforts he had to put forth in fighting mental troubles and enduring dreadful physical hardships had almost depleted his store of life-energy—his *élan vital*. Surely he might be allowed to have a rest now? Not yet. Ashamed and afraid to meet Cordelia he escapes from his friends and makes his way into the fields, where he is seen,



“ As mad as the vex’d sea : singing aloud ;  
Crown’d with rank fumiter and furrow-weeds,  
With bur-docks, hemlock, nettles, cuckoo-  
flowers,  
Darnel, and all the idle weeds that grow  
In our sustaining corn.”

What has happened is quite clear. He is having a fresh attack of *acute mania*, the immediate cause of which is equally clear. He believes Cordelia means to kill him. Why not? His other daughters whom he has loaded with benefits are after his life. What mercy can he expect from the daughter he has so grievously wronged? This is how the question presents itself to his poor sick mind, now so weakened by fortune's buffets as to be incapable of sustaining the strain of his terror and despair. This time Lear is madder than ever. Touches of childishness begin to appear. He decorates himself with wild flowers after the manner of children. Like a child he trips along, fancy-free, singing old songs and laughing at gilded butterflies. Thus occupied he happens against Edgar and his father in the "Fields near Dover." At the sight of his friends, neither of whom he recognizes, so complete is his mental dissociation, the consciousness of his rank partly returns. In high spirits he comes along shouting exultingly in reckless fashion:

"No, they cannot touch me for coining; I am the king himself."

And then he bursts out into speech that appears to be quite incoherent. What really happens, however, is that the thoughts from his subconscious mind run too rapidly for expression in words, and sentences that should appear as

associating links necessary to make the whole speech coherent—to make sense of it, in fact—are left out, and, in this way, his sentences stand as isolated expressions of memories and thoughts, and read as if these were a haphazard selection out of a miscellaneous assortment of chance ideas:

“Naturc’s above art in that respect [the king’s authority overrides law in the matter of coining?]. There’s your press-money [a recollection of forcible enlistment]. That fellow handles his bow like a crow-keeper [some memory of a stupid beginner in archery; Lear possibly sees him in hallucination]: draw me a clothier’s yard [a similar recollection]. Look, look, a mouse! Peace, peace;—this piece of toasted cheese will do’t. [It is quite possible that he actually sees a field-mouse, or some old memory may have come up.] There’s my gauntlet; I’ll prove it on a giant [a recollection of his fighting days: “I have seen the day with my good biting falchion I would have made them skip”]. Bring up the brown bills [a memory of the wars he had been through]. O, well flown, bird [his hawking days]—i’ the clout, i’ the clout: heugh! [somebody’s arrow, possibly his own, had found the target]. Give the word [the pass word].”

This speech of Lear’s is an example of what is known as “flight of ideas”; because, apart from the incoherency, the passage of thought

from one idea to the next takes place with extraordinary rapidity, and many words are skipped. Such "thought-executing" swiftness is one of the most striking characteristics of a mind in a state of *acute mania*.

But it is not only in his excitement, his incoherency, and his living in memories of the past that the disorder of Lear's mind at this time shows itself. His mentality is also seen to be at fault in his inability to grasp the nature of his surroundings. His powers of correct perception have almost disappeared. He cannot recognize Gloucester, whom he has known for years, or Edgar, his godson, with whom he was equally familiar, and from whom he parted on excellent terms only a few days ago. In all probability, too, he has lost count of time and he does not know where he is. Not only does he not recognize Gloucester, but he takes him to be Goneril with a white beard. It is probable that the sound of Gloucester's voice arouses old associations of Court scenes at which his daughter and the earl were present; or it may be that, in a dim sort of way, it brings back to him a memory of the occasion of the distribution; and so the figure of Gloucester becomes transformed for the moment by an illusory process into that of Goneril—the strong masculine character of this virago serving to facilitate the illusion. Then by one of those swift changes to which we are now

#### MADNESS IN SHAKESPEARIAN TRAGEDY

becoming accustomed, the old king's mind suddenly clears. A flood of light breaks in on him, and he realizes all at once that these daughters of his had been fooling him to the top of his bent. In endearing terms of cajoling flattery they had told him that the white hairs in his beard did not mean that he was getting old, but that they had come first in the natural course of events and the black ones afterwards. They had agreed with him in everything. He was always in the right. They had made of him, by fulsome adulation, a divinity, but it was "no good divinity," for he had discovered by bitter experience that he was only human after all—that the rain wet him, and the cold wind made his teeth chatter, and the thunder paid no heed to his commands. The very pains in his bones proclaimed to him his human frailty, and proved what liars they were.

At the end of this very "sane" speech the sound of Gloucester's voice, asking, "Is't not the king?" is again the signal for a fresh outburst of talk; this time of a type quite different from the last, characteristic of *acute mania* but observable also in other forms of mental disorder. The speech consists of expressions of recalled memories and reflections, which in days gone by he had strongly repressed from consciousness and had packed away in his mental storehouse to be deeply hidden in the recesses



of his subconscious mind. Some of these thoughts—most of them, in fact—are not edifying, while some are really horrible; though, unfortunately for mankind in general, they are not more repulsive than the usual kind of noisome stuff that lies locked up in the subconscious mind—the repressed-memory storehouse—of everyone. But when, as in Lear's case, an attack of mania thrusts aside the restraining forces of corrective, life-long, educational influences, brought to bear on the individual from babyhood upwards, the unsavoury contents of the subconscious are let loose. The refined adult mind is naturally horrified at the really dreadful utterances of the old king; but it should be remembered that these obscenities of his are not consciously expressed thoughts, but rather irresponsible utterances, when the guardian of speech—*i.e.* that which prevents people from speaking unpleasant thoughts, that which enables them to keep a guard on their tongues—is withdrawn. The French cynic who declared that speech was given to us in order to enable us to conceal our thoughts had something of this in his mind on the occasion of his witticism. Small wonder if Lear asks for an ounce of civet to sweeten his imagination. All the perfumes of Arabia would not suffice to effect that object.

Not for long, however, does the old king's mind work in a single line of thought; very



#### MADNESS IN SHAKESPEARIAN TRAGEDY

quickly his attention is distracted, and his trend of ideas is found flowing into other channels. It will not have escaped notice, too, that while he appears almost unaware of the presence of Edgar, his recently found philosopher and friend, there is something about Gloucester, his old and trusted confidant and liegeman, that touches a chord in his subconscious mind. In a dim, vague kind of way he mixes up the old earl with the products of his imagination. To Gloucester's question, "Dost thou know me?" he replies, evidently after a strong and not very successful effort at recollection:

"I remember thine eyes well enough. Dost thou squiny at me? No, do thy worst, blind Cupid; I'll not love."

➤ Love has departed out of the life of the broken-hearted Lear, and he can confidently write out a challenge defying anyone to alter his attitude in this respect. But when he asks Gloucester to read the challenge he has evidently forgotten what he had only just observed—namely, that the earl was blind. Gloucester's questioning reply,

"What, with the case of eyes?"

at once suggests to the king a subtle comparison between the earl's physical and his own mental blindness, and he sees a still further likeness

## THE MANIA OF LEAR

between them in that they are both penniless ; and “ yet,” says Lear, “ you see how this world goes.” Once more Gloucester’s reply, “ I see it feelingly,” strikes a sympathetic chord, and his thoughts run, “ He sees it feelingly ; I see it feelingly. I am mad ; therefore he is mad.” The argument is a poor one, but it starts the king into a fresh train of thought. He himself had seen much feelingly and much that his conscience had told him was wrong. He had seen “ yond justice rail upon yond simple thief ” and thought with what propriety the positions might have been reversed. He had noticed the ready submission of the cowed subject to the tyranny of authority, the self-righteous hypocrisy of the beadle lashing the whore and the glaring irony in the act of one cheat hanging another for cheating. He had seen well enough that

“ Through tatter’d clothes small vices do appear  
Robes and furr’d gowns hide all,”

and that there is one law for the rich and another for the poor. He had seen all this feelingly and, subscribing to the existing order of things, had silently acquiesced. But now his conscience smites. In thought he was a reformer before his time, but he lacked the courage of his convictions. He had seen feelingly much injustice in the world and, like many another similarly

placed, had repressed his feelings of indignation and gone in with "the image of authority." But now all this is over. For the future he will be the protector of the oppressed, will seal the accuser's lips and admonish everyone to act the part of the cunning time-server and turn a blind eye to faults and imperfections that it will be better he should not see. His declamation is brought to an end by physical pain or discomfort in his feet, and he calls out to them to pull his boots off. His mind now seems to clear. A faint light, as of the dawn, is breaking in on him. He recognizes Gloucester, but, instead of greeting him as he used to do once upon a time, he proceeds, Polonius fashion, to read him a lecture on the mystery of things:

"Thou must be patient,"

he says, in grave didactic manner,

"we came crying hither:  
Thou know'st, the first time that we smell the  
air  
We wawl and cry . . .

When we are born, we cry that we are come  
To this great stage of fools."

And lo! the sermon comes to a sudden stop. A block (mounting-block) catches his eye, and at once arrests his attention. Mounting-block suggests horses. His plan is worked out in a

## THE MANIA OF LEAR

flash. He will shoe a troop of horses with felt,  
steal on his accursed sons-in-law and,

“ Kill, kill, kill, kill, kill, kill,”

he shouts in wildly exultant tones.

In this fantasy of a quick and bloody revenge a sort of wild joy seizes him. He is the king once more, riding at the head of his troop of knights, charging down on his sons-in-law and their followers and putting them to the edge of the sword. The world of reality had brought him nothing but insults, ingratitude and physical suffering such as he had never experienced before. A homeless outcast, he had looked around him and found that all was

“ cheerless, dark and deadly.”

From such an intolerable outlook his mind seeks relief, and flies for refuge into fantasy. Rightly judged, his attacks of mania are to be regarded as unconscious attempts to escape from an enemy world into himself, so that his “ thoughts ” might be “ severed from ” his “ grief,”

“ And woes by wrong imagination lose  
The knowledge of themselves.”

His fantasy of killing is a substitute for reality—an effort to obtain in imagination the

satisfaction that was denied him in fact. In his confused state of mind, with a clouded consciousness and a very imperfect perception of his surroundings, his fantasy has for him almost, if not quite, the full psychic value of reality, and he is actually there doing bloody execution with his good biting falchion,—

killing, killing, killing, killing, killing!

But the realistic triumph of his imagination is destined to have but a short-lived existence; for in the moment of "victory" he finds himself a prisoner with the sound of the word "daughter" ringing in his ears, bringing with it a flood of painful memories and emotions. He mistakes the intentions of the gentleman and his attendants, who were sent by Cordelia to bring him to her; and his guilty conscience fills him with a fear, as unworthy as it is unfounded, that his much-injured daughter has had him arrested, probably with the intention of avenging the cruel wrongs he had done her.

→ This fresh blow to his old battered mind, coming as it does at what is popularly termed the "psychological moment" (in reality the moment when the *deus* dramatist decides that his victim must have a fresh shock—that is, just as he is in the act of having his revenge for his injuries), leaves him much in the condition of one half stunned by a physical blow on the

THE MANIA OF LEAR

head. He cannot think clearly; his mind is all confusion and he is evidently in a state of extreme fear—fear of personal injury, probably of impending death; and he contemplates the possibility of escape.

“ No rescue? What, a prisoner? ”

he cries; and, then, in despair, as of one who had abandoned hope:

“ I am even  
The natural fool of fortune.”

The turn of her wheel never, of late, brought a smile with it for him, but always a dark frown.

“ Use me well,  
You shall have ransom.”

he begs of them. And then, with a feeling that the end is close at hand, but with a last hope in his mind:

“ Let me have a surgeon;  
I am cut to the brains.”

From which it is highly probable that, in addition to his mental agony, he feels darts of dreadful physical pain in the head, as if his skull were being cleft in twain—one of the most frequent accompaniments of severe mental conflicts being almost unbearable “splitting” headaches.

Truly Lear’s description of himself as the

natural fool of fortune is a clear-cut engraving of a mind from which every trace or hope of happiness has disappeared and in which all is

“Cheerless, dark and deadly.”

Astonished and reassured by the gentleman's unexpected, generous promise,

“You shall have anything.”

he behaves like a child. “What! Anything? Everything?” he is saying to himself, and aloud:

“No seconds? All myself?”

And he feels he must weep, and probably does burst into a flood of tears.

The “Good sir,” with which the gentleman soothingly and respectfully commences to address him, in some way seems to recall the old king to a sense of his kingly dignity, and to inspire him with renewed courage. He declares:

“I will die bravely, like a smug bridegroom.

What!

I will be jovial: come, come; I am a king.  
My masters, know you that.”

But again his courage seems to ebb, and not even the assurance of the gentleman,

“You are a royal one, and we obey you,”



## THE MANIA OF LEAR

can prevent him from yielding to the urging of the primary instinct of self-preservation; and so, he takes to flight.

When next we meet Lear he has been asleep for hours and has not yet woke up. From his first words on being aroused,

“You do me wrong to take me out o’ the grave,”

it seems probable he had been dreaming that he was dead and that his spirit or soul had been consigned to a place of suffering as a punishment for his treatment of Cordelia; for he was *bound upon a wheel of fire*, while she was a beautiful spirit, who had come back from realms of bliss.

His mental confusion is correctly explained by the doctor:

“He’s scarce awake.”

The rest of this scene is of far greater dramatic than of psychological interest. The psychology is simple enough. His gradually clearing consciousness, his recognition of Cordelia, his contrition, his realization that his mind is not quite clear and his begging for forgiveness simply illustrate the gradual return to full consciousness, after sleep, of the old king in a way much as it might easily be expected to take place, having regard to all he had been through.

At one time Lear *thought* himself a prisoner, and was unhappy, downcast, frightened and in the depths of despair. He felt himself—to use his own glove-fitting description—to be “the natural fool of fortune.” But now, after the victory of Edmund, when he *finds* himself a real prisoner, with his beloved Cordelia, he is as light-hearted as “the fisherman’s boy” shouting “with his sister at play,” and exhibits a degree of happiness altogether out of proportion with his desperate position. The fact is that he has now become more childish than ever, and in addition is having a fresh, though this time a mild, attack of mania. When Cordelia asks him to visit Goneril and Regan before going to prison the reply he makes is almost a psychological curiosity, made up as it is of a blend of senility, childishness, recollections, philosophy of a sort, a pronounced feeling of earthly immortality and an infinite tenderness of emotional expression. He implores her:

“No, no, no, no! Come, let’s away to  
prison:  
We two alone will sing like birds i’ the cage:  
When thou dost ask me blessing, I’ll kneel  
down  
And ask of thee forgiveness: so we’ll live,  
And pray, and sing, and tell old tales, and  
laugh  
At gilded butterflies, and hear poor rogues

THE MANIA OF LEAR

Talk of court news; and we'll talk with them  
too,  
Who loses, and who wins; who's in, who's out;  
And take upon's the mystery of things,  
As if we were God's spies: and we'll wear out,  
In a wall'd prison, packs and sets of great ones,  
That cbb and flow by the moon."

He is the child-lover singing love songs to his little sweetheart. He is partly the naughty boy, partly the old man, who has offended his darling and would be forgiven. He is the child-poet, weaving fantasies of song and fairy tale with his well-beloved. And then he is the king, listening, with a quiet laugh, to the poor rogues who would brag of their familiarity with the ways of princes and kings and indulge in fashionable Court gossip. And then he is himself again, laughing at the philosophers who would explain "God" and the universe, and claim an intimate acquaintanceship with Him and His ways; and he is immortal—assured that he will live for ever with Cordelia, watching the great ones come and go. He is almost a demigod. For their sacrifice the gods will come down bearing incense. Nevermore will he and his beloved be parted, unless someone burns them out of prison. She must not weep:

"The good-years shall devour them, flesh and  
fell  
Ere they shall make us weep."

His cup of joy is full to overflowing. His soul has absolute content. Hand in hand (we may suppose) they march to prison. But the duration of his little earthly paradise is brief, though long enough in the opinion of the dramatist; for shortly after the prison doors were closed on them the old king in a frenzy of rage is engaged in killing the "slave" who is hanging his daughter and is gazing stupefied on her lifeless body.

This was the last blow, and it left Lear with what remained to him of a mind in a hopelessly shattered condition—in a state of disorganization which it is impossible to believe could ever be rectified. Psychologically considered, the stroke was unnecessarily forcible. It was as if one were to use a sledge-hammer to drive a tin-tack; it was like breaking "a butterfly upon a wheel."

When Lear appears on the stage with Cordelia dead in his arms his power of reasoning is fading fast, and he is dominated almost completely by his emotions. He is unable to understand why those around him do not unite with him in uttering lamentations so loud

"That heaven's vault should crack."

At one moment he is assured that Cordelia is dead; at the next, he will not believe it. He

## THE MANIA OF LEAR

tries a looking-glass and a feather. The stirring of the feather revives his hopes :

“ This feather stirs : she lives. If it be so,  
It is a chance which does redeem all sorrows  
That ever I have felt.”

Again it is to be noticed that he does not recognize Kent or Edgar, but calls them murderers and traitors. At last he seems to realize that his child is dead :

“ Now, she’s gone for ever ! ”

Then again he won’t believe it, and talks to her lovingly as if she were alive :

“ Cordelia, Cordelia ! Stay a little. Ha !  
What is’t thou say’st ? ”

Bending over her with his ear close to her lips he hears the tones of her beautiful voice (in hallucination) and whispers to himself :

“ Her voice was ever soft,  
Gentle, and low, an excellent thing in woman.”

Then with the words,

“ I kill’d the slave that was a-hanging thee,”

he forgets all about his murdered child. His mind flies away back to the past, and soon he

MADNESS IN SHAKESPEARIAN TRAGEDY

becomes confused and incoherent. What he says is

“matter and impertinency mix’d.”

He recalls his fighting days. He realizes he is old. His remark,

“Mine eyes are not o’ the best,”

may be taken literally or as indicating an impairment of vision following on his rapidly fading life. In a dazed, dim kind of way he sees Kent, and scarcely recognizes him. As the end is approaching, the words he utters have little or no meaning for himself or for those about him, nor does he comprehend what is said to him. “Ay, so I think,” he remarks, in a dull, emotionless, casual manner, when he hears that his daughters “desperately are dead.”

And now we must picture the old king standing silent, his vitality at a very low ebb, and, for the time, his mentality either in abeyance or almost so. Suddenly, as Albany is speaking, something happens, causing the speaker to exclaim: “See, see!”

It is of course impossible for us to know certainly what did happen. It seems pretty certain that something strange in Lear’s behaviour has called forth the remark. After several

## THE MANIA OF LEAR

conjectures, that have occurred to me, that which appears rather more probable than any of the others is this: I think the old king has fallen forward on Cordelia's body, that he is fondling her hair and face and gazing lovingly on her features, trying for the last time to find some sign of life in her, and, having failed, cries out in despair:

“ And my poor fool is hang'd ! No, no, no life !  
Why should a dog, a horse, a rat, have life,  
And thou no breath at all ? Thou'lt come no  
more,  
Never, never, never, never, never ! ”

And then, so easy is it to distract his attention, so emotionless, too, is he becoming, that a button becomes the object of his concern:

“ Pray you, undo this button: thank you, sir.”

Just as this office is finished, Cordelia's lips catch his eye. They seem to him to move as in speaking: and as he breathes his last words,

“ Do you see this ? Look on her,—look,—her  
lips,  
Look there, look there ! ”

he hears her whispering in her beautiful, soft low voice an invitation to pass to her into the



MADNESS IN SHAKESPEARIAN TRAGEDY

great unknown, to an abode of eternal happiness  
where they would

“sing, and tell old tales, and laugh  
At gilded butterflies.”

When the king dies, Edgar believes that he  
has only fainted. Kent knows better, and tells  
them so in words of wisdom, which contain  
even more wisdom than he is aware of:

➤ “Vex not his ghost: O, let him pass! he hates  
him  
That would upon the rack of this tough world  
Stretch him out longer.”

➤ It is best that Lear should die, not only to end  
his troubles, but also because if he had lived he  
would almost certainly have been a hopeless  
dement—a living being without a mind.

## V

### THE MANIA OF OPHELIA

It is interesting to note, as probably something not merely coincidental, but as implying design on the part of the dramatist, that the explanation given by Polonius of Hamlet's strange behaviour in Ophelia's closet,

“ This is the very ecstasy of love ;  
Whose violent property fordoes itself,  
And leads the will to desperate undertakings  
As oft as any passion under heaven  
That does afflict our natures,”

while it is certainly incorrect in the sense in which he meant it as applied to Hamlet (notwithstanding Ophelia's opinion to the contrary) fits very closely the case of the fair girl, his daughter, to whom he is speaking ; and in this transposition of application one seems to detect a sort of subtle irony in the mind of the dramatist.

Whatever may be thought about Hamlet, about the various states of mental disorder in which he appears at different times—states of excitement, states of depression, confused and

hallucinatory states, and doubtful states of a borderland type; however much we may be puzzled by difficulties that meet us in our efforts to unravel such a complex piece of tangle as the mind of the Prince of Denmark shows itself to be at times, and in assigning to the causes that gave rise to his mental disorder their relative significance and importance—there can be no question at all in the case of Ophelia, either as to the causes that made her mad or of the nature of her mental attack.

Her speeches and behaviour during her madness, her irrelevant answers and references, her sad songs about her father, her love songs about her lover (in which she tells us without restraint her very realistic fantasies—probably not very different from those of many young girls “madly” in love), her presents of flowers symbolizing her fancies, and the manner of her death so graphically described by the queen, all point to the overthrow of a mind from which reason and normal consciousness were completely obliterated; and in which the horror of a father’s murder at the hands of her lover, and a maiden’s despair owing to the loss of one the love of whom had become her “whole existence,” had played havoc with law and order. She was living in her past, too, in her subconscious mind of vague memories and fantasies of all that might have been, and

## THE MANIA OF OPHELIA

under grave misapprehension about what, in her deluded mind, she believed had happened; mistaking for reality the product of her imagination.

All things considered, the kind of madness and the degree of madness manifested in Ophelia were very much such as might be expected under the circumstances. A tender, loving girl, without the fortitude of an Imogen or a Helena, not possessing the high spirits of a Beatrice or a Rosalind, inferior in will-power to either of the Portias, but reminding one somewhat, in her nature, of Desdemona—a girl who, with all her charm, had really very little will of her own, she proved unequal in her contest with the deadly buffets of fortune.

She broke down completely, and passed into a state of *acute mania*, from which it is doubtful if she would ever have recovered even if the accident of her death had not placed the matter beyond the region of debate.

The madness of Ophelia differed in many important respects from that of her lover: for Hamlet, as has been said, was for the most part sane. His abnormal states of over-depression and over-excitement, his mental confusion and his hallucinatory states, should be regarded as temporary lapses from a general mental condition, which, though characterized by a high degree of mental activity, excitability

and instability—in fact, nearly always ready for a breakdown—must be considered as being, on the whole, well within the limits of sanity: while in Ophelia's case the collapse was complete. She had passed far over the borderland into the territory of the maniac, where all the functions of her ordinary consciousness were abrogated, or so badly damaged as to be unrecognizable as those of Ophelia as she was once, in the days when she loved not wisely but too well; when her whole heart was given to that most fascinating of princely lovers—the courtier, soldier, scholar,

“The expectancy and rose of the fair state,  
The glass of fashion and the mould of form,  
The observed of all observers.”

One would like to have known more of her in those days when she could answer so prettily and wittily her rather detestable brother on his highfalutin moral lecture to her about the preservation of her virtue from the supposed designs of the noble-minded Prince of Denmark:

“But, good my brother,  
Do not, as some ungracious pastors do,  
Show me the steep and thorny way to heaven,  
Whilst, like a puff'd and reckless libertine,  
Himself the primrose path of dalliance treads  
And recks not his own rede.”

#### THE MANIA OF OPHELIA

After which the brotherly moralist thought it expedient to hasten his departure for the moral atmosphere of Paris.

When due allowance is made for age, sex, circumstance and environment, there is a strong similarity between her mental condition and that of Lear. He, too, like Ophelia, was deprived of clear consciousness, and the utterances from his subconscious were characterized by lack of the restraining influences of cultural acquirements; and that strange compulsion — so very common in these cases, as many people are aware — for the afflicted persons to decorate themselves with flowers appeared alike in two beings almost at the opposite extremes of life. It is due to a general tendency of the mind in many cases of disorder to wander back to early, happy days, when children love to make for themselves garlands of wild flowers. It may be an inartistic view to take, but it seems rather sad that Shakespeare should have thought it necessary, for dramatic purposes and in order to drive this young girl mad before killing her, to inflict more than one terrible blow on her unoffending and unresisting head. One would think that the rending of her love idyll would have been sufficient for his purpose; but he must needs arrange also for the murder of her much-

loved father by the sword of her still more adored lover.

“*Quos Deus vult perdere, prius dementat*”; and there can be no doubt that the *Deus*, Shakespeare, does his work very effectively in the case of Ophelia.

As is usual in cases of acute mania, the speeches and behaviour of Ophelia present a mixture of simplicity and obscurity—of

“matter and impertinency mix’d!  
Reason in madness!”

Even the apparently simple parts of her utterances are liable to be misunderstood unless it is remembered that she is speaking from her subconscious mind, reproducing memories, chanting “snatches of old tunes” or repeating repressed fantasies of all that might have been.

One would particularly wish to emphasize that her love songs, of which Hamlet was evidently the theme, are nothing more than reproductions of daydreams of the past. Some of her speeches have been happily explained by Shakespearian scholars, who have discovered the references: but even in these cases, while the explanation is forthcoming, the relevancy is not always manifest. Her songs of mourning for her dead father are so simple as



## THE MANIA OF OPHELIA

to need no explanatory commentary, but in her little verse,

“ How should I your true love know  
From another one?  
By his cockle hat and staff  
And his sandal shoon.”

the reference is not quite clear, unless it means that she had been weaving pretty fancies of her lover in the guise of a pilgrim, coming to woo her.

In the story of her madness, as it appears in the text, there is one passage which is certainly puzzling in parts. It is that in which Horatio describes Ophelia's condition to the queen:

“ She speaks much of her father; says she  
hears  
There's tricks i' the world; and hems, and  
beats her heart;  
Spurns enviously at straws; speaks things in  
doubt,  
That carry but half sense: her speech is  
nothing,  
Yet the unshaped use of it doth move  
The hearers to collection; they aim at it,  
And botch the words up fit to their own  
thoughts;  
Which, as her winks, and nods, and gestures  
yield them,

Indeed would make one think there might  
 be thought,  
 Though nothing sure, yet much unhappily."

(For convenience of reference the speech is quoted in full.) That she should speak much of her father is only natural: but what are the "tricks i' the world"? One may conjecture that she had been dwelling on the tricks that fortune played her; that, like Lear (and with equally good reason), she had begun to think herself "the natural fool of fortune."

"Tricks i' the world" would be the ill-defined yet abiding impression left in her subconscious mind of being hardly dealt with. The "beats her heart" is a symbolical expression of her grief; "spurns enviously at straws," a child-like fashion (a return to child ways) of showing her resentment at her treatment, and "her speech is nothing," a confession of Horatio's inability to understand it; because, like the "hearers," he botches the words up fit to his own thoughts — a general failing of all of us whenever we attempt to think out the hidden meanings of the puzzling speeches often made by people of disordered minds. Concerning her "winks and nods and gestures" all that need be said here is that these are symbolical expressions of the feelings or emotions aroused by her mental conflicts.

## THE MANIA OF OPHELIA

For the rest, beyond the fact that her attack was an exceptionally severe one, there is in Ophelia's mania nothing more remarkable than may be observed in the cases of scores of people similarly afflicted. In truth, it is in itself remarkable enough that

“ a young maid's wits  
Should be as mortal as an old man's life.”

And, great as is the horror of it, the wonder is not less; because it is quite impossible to say what it is that actually happens in a mind to convert it from a condition of sanity into one of insanity. Indeed, we are by no means sure what we mean by either term.

One matter of interest seems to call for a few words of notice.

It has been said—and is usually taken for granted — that Ophelia committed suicide; but a careful reading of the manner of her death does not confirm this view. Indeed, her act of trying to hang her coronet weeds on the “pendent boughs” of the willow-tree has probably quite a different significance; for the willow, as we know, is the symbol of sorrow, and it may be supposed that as she climbed up she was fulfilling the suggestions of her grief, wishing to make a votive

#### MADNESS IN SHAKESPEARIAN TRAGEDY

offering of her weedy trophies on the branches of the tree of sorrow, without the slightest intention of drowning herself, and unconscious of danger both before and after falling "in the weeping brook."

## VI

### THE MADNESS OF LADY MACBETH

WHEN Macbeth first broached the subject of the "enterprise" to his wife her quick woman's wit at once grasped the situation and, in her practical mind, thought rapidly moved on to action. Duncan "must be provided for." One thing only was lacking—opportunity. They must wait till time and place adhered.

This was how matters stood when her husband's startling letter, with the account of the witches' prophecies, was brought to her. These "weird sisters" had "more in them than mortal knowledge." They had "all-hailed" him "Thane of Cawdor," and lo! he was Thane of Cawdor. They had referred him "to the coming on of time, with, 'Hail, king that shall be,'" and as she reads the words "the golden round" seems almost within her grasp. She is resolved to have it.

"Glamis thou art, and Cawdor; and shalt be  
What thou art promised,"

she exclaims exultingly; and then comes a

check. Can she depend on him? She knows his nature :

“ It is too full o’ the milk of human kindness  
To catch the nearest way.”

He may fail her at the crisis ; and so when the messenger enters to interrupt her thoughts with the fateful announcement,

“ The king comes here to-night,”

her mind is made up at once. She will do the deed herself. She will not trust her vacillating lord, but will use her own keen knife and settle the matter that way. She is in dead earnest, but feels it necessary to steel herself for the acting of the dreadful thing. The interim is short. Duncan is on the way. It is true that her husband is coming too — the mighty warrior, Macbeth. But she will not trust him.

In order to fortify herself for the deed she calls upon

“ you spirits  
That tend on mortal thoughts ”

to unsex her, to fill her with direst cruelty ; to make her blood thick ; to make her insensible to pity so

“ That no compunctious visitings of nature ”

THE MADNESS OF LADY MACBETH

shall shake her fell purpose. She invokes the "murdering ministers" to make her milk gall; and, finally, when all this is supposed done, and she is ready for action, she makes her final appeal to the night to "help" her. And a strange appeal it is:

"Come, thick night,  
And pall thee in the dunnest smoke of hell,  
That my keen knife see not the wound it  
makes,  
Nor heaven peep through the blanket of the  
dark,  
To cry, 'Hold, hold!'"

A strange appeal indeed, for it is difficult to see how absence of light could help her in the successful delivery of the blow, or act otherwise than in hindering, or even defeating her purpose altogether. There is clearly something wrong in this part of her "preparation." Until this moment she evidently had not thought "precisely on the event." She had contemplated murder at a distance with comforting satisfaction; but now, on closer inspection, the prospect does not seem so attractive. Her own vividly descriptive words,

*"That my keen knife see not the wound it makes,"*

bring the acting of the dreadful thing into her immediate presence, and she cannot see



herself doing the deed. She would be unable to look on at the keen knife driven by her own hand making the penetrating wound, from which the warm, red blood would gush out, and so she would welcome the protecting pall of night to cover up the scene from her vision—a scene so dreadful that she feels herself shrinking in horror from the “acting,” and imagining heaven (personifying her affrighted conscience) peeping through the blanket of the dark and crying, “Hold, hold!” How she might have acted if her husband had not come in just then it is useless to speculate. Her intense relief at his entrance is transparent, and is reflected in her wild pæan of “welcome.” With characteristic rapidity of thought she puts behind her all her wild and futile fantasies and readily transfers to him the rôle of principal in the act, in the rehearsal of which she had so ignominiously failed. She assumes without question, also in characteristic fashion, that he will do the infamous work from which she recoils. With amazing subtlety she pours her Machiavellian precepts into his not very responsive ear. Her little speech is really a masterpiece of cunning worthy of Mark Antony. But the prospect is not attractive to Macbeth either, and his laconic remark,

“ We will speak further,”

## THE MADNESS OF LADY MACBETH

was somewhat disconcerting, and a timely warning that the task was still in front of her of chastising with the valour of her tongue all that was impeding him "from the golden round."

This, as we all know, she succeeds in doing, little dreaming that in deciding the question of Duncan's fate she is also determining the destruction of the mental lives of both of them. Macbeth's doom is sealed at the moment when he strikes the fatal blow, and hers when she takes the daggers from his bloodstained hands and walks "boldly" with them into the chamber of death. It is then, as she looks on the kindly face of the old king, that a wild terror seizes her, for she knows herself for what she is—a murderess, the virtual slayer of an old man who looks so like her father; and as she sees him lying there in a pool of blood, and watches the warm life-blood oozing from the gaping wound, she may well have muttered to herself: "I have done the deed." She is now seeing in reality that which she previously dared not look on even in prospect, and there is no pall of night to hide the ghastly spectacle from her terrified gaze. The smell of the blood nauseates her. Her mind begins to wander. In dreamy fashion she wonders how it is that the old man has so much blood in him. She looks in horror at her hands,

with the spots of blood from the daggers on them.

With a supreme effort she regains command of herself—needs must when the devil drives—but the mischief is done. A memory-picture of the terrible scene is stamped on her mind, to dwell there and be a living torment to her; to haunt her day and night, and to appear before her towards the end (when she was becoming, or had become, quite mad) in her somnambulistic dream as a visual, realistic presentation, re-enacting for her the whole of this appalling episode.

But however severe the shock to Lady Macbeth from her visit to the death-chamber she shows no sign of it on her return. On the contrary, finding that she has to face a new and desperate situation, she puts on all her armour and prepares for action. A desperate situation, in truth—with both their hands smeared with Duncan's blood, a terror-stricken husband to hamper her, and the murdered king's bodyguard thundering at the gates for admission.

In the scene that ensues, Lady Macbeth is evidently acting a part—the part of “poor, weak woman”; but it is an unaccustomed rôle and she plays it badly. She takes her cue from Macduff's opportune expression of tender concern for her :

THE MADNESS OF LADY MACBETH

“ O gentle lady,  
'Tis not for you to hear what I shall speak.”

She grasps at the idea, and proceeds to act the “gentle lady”; but the insincerity apparent in her first attempt,

“ Woe, alas!  
What, in our house?”

does not escape the observation of the astute Banquo. His sharp comment,

“ Too cruel, anywhere,”

warns her that she has made a *faux pas*, and that it will be safer for her to remain silent. Her attempt at fainting can hardly be regarded as a success. In her exclamation,

“ Help me hence, ho ! ”

one may discern an urgent wish to escape from an awkward situation rather than a genuine cry of alarm arising from fear of collapse. Still, she may have felt both, and probably did. She had reason to fear for her personal safety and that of her husband, and the quite exceptionally severe stresses to which she had been subjected ever since the reading of the letter were sufficient—and, as many would think, more than sufficient—to exhaust her available store of vital energy. She needed rest and “the

#### MADNESS IN SHAKESPEARIAN TRAGEDY

season of all natures, sleep," in order to recuperate. But even now, in the retirement of her chamber, there was no rest for her troubled mind, for she was practically on trial for her life and had to endure a further period of terrible suspense until the verdict of acquittal by Banquo's "court of inquiry" brought her a longed-for relief and at last she could breathe freely.

During the hours and days following this series of scenes of intense excitement—scenes fraught with anxiety and often of terror-inspiring experiences—the workings of Lady Macbeth's mind form interesting matter for speculation. Her trends of thought, one may believe, would alternate between what was done and what was to come. On the one hand, her sense of guilt would lie heavy on her, while on the other, reflection would show her that she had accomplished all she had set out to do. Duncan was in his grave. After life's fitful fever he slept well. The golden round was hers, or would be in a day or two. She had gained that

"Which shall to all our nights and days to come  
Give solely sovereign sway and masterdom."

—and she lost what everyone loses when he commits a shameful crime. He can no longer think of himself as *Integer vitæ Scelerisque purus*.

## THE MADNESS OF LADY MACBETH

It would seem, from our experience of the world, from our knowledge of men and women, that there are people who, if they were placed in Lady Macbeth's shoes, would soothe their conscience by considerations of material gain. In fact, we know there are such people, and so it is possible to imagine her setting out for Scone with her husband and returning with suppressed cries of "*Io triumphe!*" It is possible to think of her "living down" any feelings of remorse, and whispering to herself not to think "so brain-sickly of things," but rather to enjoy in the possession of the crown that satisfaction which at one time she had been looking forward to find in it. She had proved herself a woman of great courage, determination, resource and will-power, and of unusual capacity for quick adaptation to changing circumstances. She could look like the innocent flower,

"But be the serpent under't."

She can tell her husband:

"I have given suck, and know  
How tender 'tis to love the babe that milks me."

Yet she does not hesitate to add:

"I would, while it was smiling in my face,  
Have pluck'd my nipple from his boneless  
gums,

MADNESS IN SHAKESPEARIAN TRAGEDY

And dash'd the brains out, had I so sworn  
as you  
Have done to this."

With such sentiments as these it is quite easy to think of her as flinging remorse to the winds and finding, for any uneasy feeling she may experience, compensation in the exercise of her queenly powers and in the enjoyment of the dignities attaching to her high office. But in whatever way these opposing feelings—remorse for her crime on the one hand and elation at the fulfilment of her ambition on the other—may be supposed to affect her, one is hardly prepared to find her in the lowest depths of despondency, pouring forth her soul in the lamentation:

"Nought's had, all's spent,  
When our desire is got without content:  
'Tis safer to be that which we destroy,  
Than, by destruction, dwell in doubtful joy."

It does not seem possible to discover in this pessimistic wail any trace of the old Lady Macbeth. It is a veritable metamorphosis, and one is compelled to take a serious view of her mental condition. The fire of the life-energy that had kept her going all through her high-pressure strivings towards a goal had apparently gone out, and left her listless, despairing, aimless, hopeless, unable to see anything better



#### THE MADNESS OF LADY MACBETH

to do than to die. All things considered, too, one feels inclined to agree with her. The crown that she had fought so hard to win meant nothing to her now, because her soul was weighed down with the burden of her guilt, and the only ostensible purpose in keeping her alive was in order that she might fulfil an essential part of the *motif* of the tragedy—namely, that she must first be made quite mad before being utterly destroyed. To which end events now begin to move quickly. There is a banquet to-night; the guests are all invited. She sends a message to the king that she “would attend his leisure for a few words.” He comes to her in person, and if, on his entrance, his “rugged looks” do not arouse (or confirm) strong suspicions as to his sanity, his wild and extravagant language can hardly fail to do so. What is she to think of a man who talks like this?—

“ But let the frame of things disjoint, both the  
worlds suffer,  
Ere we will eat our meal in fear, and sleep  
In the affliction of these terrible dreams,  
That shake us nightly: better be with the  
dead,  
Whom we, to gain our peace, have sent to  
peace,  
Than on the torture of the mind to lie  
In restless ecstasy.”

What can she think except that his mind is in a state of profound disorder, and that he is utterly unfit to fulfil his functions as host at the banquet—while she herself, instead of appearing as hostess, ought to be in bed. But even now her magnificent courage does not forsake her. By an almost superhuman effort she rises to the occasion. She gives him soothing and encouraging words :

“ Gentle my lord, sleek o’er your rugged looks ;  
Be bright and jovial among your guests to-  
night.”

But all the while her mind is full of the gravest apprehensions for her own strength, lest it should fail her in the coming ordeal, and of fears for what he may do.

The manner in which Lady Macbeth acquitted herself among this assembly of lords and gentlemen—all fighting men, probably—the courage she displayed, her tact and resource in trying to shield her mad husband, her perfect self-command, her ingenious excuses for him, her attempt to explain away his astounding behaviour, her queenly dignity and authoritative bearing and her gracious good-night to her guests, are familiar matters to all readers of the play, who may be forgiven if, in their absorption in the dramatic interest of the scene, they lose sight, for the time, of the

#### THE MADNESS OF LADY MACBETH

fact that they are witnessing the passing on of a piece of mortality over the borderland into the country of the lost ones. The trial of the banquet is the last straw, and we never see her sane again. Her already enfeebled mind has given way at last, and she becomes as mad as her husband—madder, in fact.

It is difficult to avoid the conclusion that Shakespeare, before sacrificing his principal characters on the altar of tragedy, decides to make them mad first. To those of us who believe this, and who are curious to learn his executive methods, the somnambulism of Lady Macbeth offers an exceptionally fine opportunity for observation; because, owing to the splitting of her personality and the obliteration of her consciousness, there lies before us, in clear view, her subconscious mind overcharged with mental disease-producing stuff. This is the stuff between which and her conscience a fierce battle has been raging, with greater or less intensity, practically ever since the plan to murder Duncan had taken definite hold on her.

The picture reveals to us snatches, taken without regard to the order of their occurrence, of events associated with the murder. The bloodstain on her hand, as might be expected, and her ineffectual attempts to wash it off are frequently to the front in this terrible dream-

walk. The smell of the blood, too, comes back to her. She is down in hell—hell, the shadow of a soul on fire. There is no rest for her. One incident after another comes rushing in on her—faggots, as it were, thrown in to keep the fires burning. “One, two,” she hears the clock striking; “why, then, ’tis time to do’t.” “Fie, my lord, fie! a soldier and afeard,” and then once more she is wondering that the old man has so much blood in him. Lady Macduff’s murder, the blood on her hand again, and a glimpse of her terrified husband at the banquet, come up in quick succession. Hardly anything is left out in this mad jumble of revivals of the incidents of her fatal march to the goal of her ambition. It is no wonder that she is mad.

But although this rather wonderful picture of the content of Lady Macbeth’s subconscious mind shows up with perfect clarity the direct cause of her insanity, it does this only, and leaves us uninformed on much that we should like to know about the fascinating personality of this remarkable woman—the most interesting woman character, I think, that Shakespeare has drawn for us. More especially should we like to probe into the depths of her mind in order to discover what evil influence it was that urged her on in her wild career—an influence so powerful that it broke down the opposing force of peculiarly strong

### THE MADNESS OF LADY MACBETH

conscientious scruples and enabled her to be guilty of the atrocious crime of murdering an inoffensive, amiable, lovable old gentleman who resembled her father, not only in features, but in his fatherly, loving attitude towards herself. A worse crime it is difficult to imagine. The difficulty of finding or suggesting a reasonable explanation is increased by the reflection that Lady Macbeth was at one time a woman who had experienced the tender emotion of love as a wife and as a mother, as well as filial affection for her father; and so we must believe that there had come upon her some great change, involving her whole nature and disposition. It is hard, if not impossible, without such an assumption, to think of a loving mother becoming a murderess just for the sake of ambition for a crown. The likeliest and, it may be, the only solution of the problem is that Lady Macbeth had been becoming insane for some time, and that the madness from which she suffered and died had already set in, and was showing itself—as such early madness frequently does—in exalted ideas, unbalanced reasoning powers, excessive emotional states, a failure of sense of proportion in matters of conduct and in states such as that in which we have already seen and heard her, announcing her murderous intentions, making her valiant “preparation” and behaving, in general, like

#### MADNESS IN SHAKESPEARIAN TRAGEDY

a Fury on the warpath. When we come to think of Lady Macbeth in this way our attention is attracted to certain peculiarities of her mental make-up and to certain circumstances of her life that do not conduce to orderliness in thought and conduct. We notice in her an unusual abundant store of vital energy, largely manifested in excessive mental activity of the emotional type, and we remember that such activity in minds of faulty construction may contribute towards a mental disaster, as it certainly did in Hamlet and Lear, and, to a less degree possibly, in Macbeth himself. In Lady Macbeth the gross and apparently self-determined misapplication of her high mental capabilities would serve to augment any tendency to mental disorder arising out of the possession of an over-active mind. There were troubles, too, in her life. She had had a baby, and knew

“How tender ’tis to nurse the babe that milks me,”

but she does not appear to have had much love for her husband. When he returns home safe from the wars she does not welcome or embrace him, but greets him with a wild cry of savage joy, not as a beloved husband, but as a kind of *deus* or, rather, *diabolus*, who steps in opportunely to do her murderous work for

#### THE MADNESS OF LADY MACBETH

her. It is significant that they had no children. Had there been one or two little ones in the nursery there would almost certainly have been another tale to tell. Fortune was not on her side in the ordering of her life or helpful in averting adventitious evils. The likeness she discovers between her father and Duncan just before she murders him (by proxy) would increase the efficacy of the perilous stuff she was instilling into her bosom to weigh upon the heart. In her subconscious mind, and possibly in her conscious mind also, the murder would be presented as an act of parricide. A hardly less deadly effect would be produced by the feeling of superstitious awe, according to which the murder of a king was at that time regarded as an act of sacrilege. One may well believe that "a holy terror" possessed her as she listened to the words that fell from the horrified Macduff on his discovery of the murder:

"Most sacrilegious murder hath broke ope  
The Lord's anointed temple."

Truly she was in the fell clutch of circumstance, an octopus clutch with a tentacle for each aspect of her compound sin—murder, parricide, regicide, sacrilege, treachery, breach of hospitality—with a possible extension of the list in the dark, unfathomed depths of her



#### MADNESS IN SHAKESPEARIAN TRAGEDY

stormy mind. And yet, notwithstanding all her tortures, she did not wince or cry aloud, but fought on until she was utterly destroyed. She was a great woman, was Lady Macbeth, but she overestimated her powers of endurance. In doing so she proved herself to be human. She was a woman only, not a superwoman.

## VII

### GONERIL: A MENTAL MONSTROSITY

THE play of *King Lear* leaves one with a curious impression—right or wrong—which we do not get from any of the other tragedies—the impression, namely, that most of the characters seem to have a twofold personality, in that, in addition to being really live persons, they are also personifications of mental qualities, generally of the nature of goodness or badness. Thus Kent is a grand fellow, but he is also a personification of nobility, fidelity, loyalty and courage. He is a sort of hero without any blemish; whereas Oswald personifies sycophancy and cowardice. He is a villain without a trace of any kind of virtue. Cornwall and Regan are well matched in representing vindictive cruelty. The Fool is a combination of altruism with wisdom and opportune jokes, to grapple to one's soul with hoops of steel—a very worthy Fool, without a serious flaw in his make-up. And so to a greater or lesser extent with nearly all the characters: they are themselves and they are also mental qualities appearing in human form. In Goneril this

#### MADNESS IN SHAKESPEARIAN TRAGEDY

twofold personality is present in a remarkable way. She has very little in her in common with humanity, but is a personification of a type of mind in which emotion, tender or otherwise, is but feebly represented—or possibly lacking altogether. Love, gratitude, hate, pity, remorse and purposive cruelty apparently find no place in her. It is even doubtful if she has any feelings of fear or natural desire. She is neither moral nor immoral. She is simply non-moral. She is a personality without a conscience. She can witness her old father's mental tortures and see him, with his venerable white head, walking out at night into the pitiless storm, without showing any kind of feeling at all, or experiencing subsequent self-reproach for her callous indifference as to whether he went or not. She can with the utmost coolness recommend plucking out eyes, or do a murder without moulting a feather, and she can see the man to whom she has offered her unlawful love in the bitter pangs of death and speak no word of love or even ordinary human sympathy to him. In fact, what she does say,

“ This is practice, Gloucester :  
By the law of arms, thou wast not bound to  
answer  
An unknown opposite ; thou art not vanquished  
But cozen'd and beguiled.”

#### GONERIL: A MENTAL MONSTROSITY

signifies a mere expression of disapproval of his bad judgement in accepting a challenge which he might quite well have declined. Her equanimity is not disturbed. Why should it be? Had she not just poisoned her sister in the way of business, and the matter evidently was not troubling her very much? To act as a Job's consoler to a dying man to whom she had vowed her love might be regarded as a refinement of cruelty; but it was not meant for cruelty: it was merely lack of emotivity; all the more difficult to understand because the death of Edmund meant also for her the finish of her ambitious schemes.

Even when she is faced with the most damning proof in her own handwriting of her plot to murder her husband, in order that she may be free to marry Edmund, she exhibits no emotion, but remains unabashed, unrepentant, shameless and, apparently, unafraid! It was a moment when any woman with a touch of feeling in her would have been overwhelmed by mixed emotions, but in her reply to Albany's stern and unanswerable bare statement of the truth,

“ I perceive you know it,”

there is no note of perturbation, contrition or fear. On the contrary, she practically challenges him to do his worst:

“ Say, if I do—the laws are mine, not thine :  
Who can arraign me for’t? ”

The man is simply flabbergasted by his wife's audacity, and can only exclaim: “ Most monstrous! ”—the which expression may be accepted literally as accurately descriptive of the woman herself. She was, as Lear would say, “ disnatured ” —a moral monstrosity in woman's shape. On the other hand she was, unlike her sister Regan, incapable of showing petty spite. She would pluck out Gloucester's eyes, so as to render him impotent for further mischief, but she would not pull his beard, because she would gain nothing by doing so.

Was she insane? It is as we look at it. She was not insane in the same sense that Lear, Macbeth, Lady Macbeth, Ophelia, Hamlet at times, and Othello at the very end, were insane. The minds of these people were thrown into disorder, permanently or temporarily, as a result of their mental conflicts. Goneril had no mental conflicts, because she was without emotion or conscience, and therefore could not become insane in the sense in which the term is ordinarily used. And yet she was very far from being “ normal. ” If there is such a thing as “ moral insanity ” —a debatable question—then she was morally insane.

It is not easy, when one thinks precisely on

GONERIL : A MENTAL MONSTROSITY

the matter, to conceive of an absolutely emotionless or even of a loveless woman; but when we come to review the whole of Goneril's conduct, her treatment of her loving old father, her murderous designs against a kind-hearted husband, her horribly cold-blooded calculating *aside* on hearing of her brother-in-law's death,

“ One way I like this well ;  
But being widow, and my Gloucester with her,  
May all the building in my fancy pluck  
Upon my hateful life : another way,  
The news is not so tart.”

and her emotionless attitude towards “ my Gloucester ” in his dying moments, it seems impossible to come to any other conclusion than that she is almost, if not quite, a stranger to any kind of tender emotion. That she can deceive the astute Edmund into the belief that she really loves him is a high tribute to her skill in the art of hypocrisy, in which art she had already shown her proficiency in her acting before her father. But if Goneril had no love for Edmund he certainly had some attraction for her. Regardless of the presence of Oswald she kisses him, gives him a favour, calls him :

“ My most dear Gloucester ! ”

MADNESS IN SHAKESPEARIAN TRAGEDY

and after he goes out compares him with her husband, much to the disadvantage of the latter:

“ O, the difference of man and man!  
To thee a woman’s services are due:  
My fool usurps my body.”

And we ask ourselves the questions: “ What is the nature of this attraction? What is really in her mind as she delivers herself of these thoughts? The tenor of her speech to her “ most dear Gloucester ” when he is manifestly dying seems to positively preclude the notion that it was love. Admiration, then, for his qualities as a man and a soldier? Yes, possibly; but in the same kind of way as a soldier looks upon his gun—as a useful weapon with which to effect the object. One is compelled to believe that this heartless, ambitious woman regarded Edmund simply as an instrument she meant to use for the attainment of her ultimate object—the “ golden round ” that had proved such a fatal attraction for Lady Macbeth. It would seem, then, that Edmund was mistaken when he thinks of the two sisters as being

“ Each jealous of the other, as the stung  
Are of the adder.”

At the least he was mistaken as far as Goneril was concerned. Edmund certainly



GONERIL : A MENTAL MONSTROSITY

had a "guid conceit o' himsel'"; and he was justified, and more than justified, in regarding himself as intellectually superior to those with whom his life was mixed up; but his judgement is at fault—as whose is not?—when he flatters himself that he can successfully explore the dark, unfathomed depths of a woman's mind, especially if she has a very definite motive in keeping them dark. And so, when his self-over-estimation is disclosed in his belief in his double conquest,

“ Yet Edmund was beloved :  
The one the other poison'd for my sake,  
And after slew herself.”

it would seem that he is wide of the mark.

Goneril poisons her sister not out of jealousy, as Edmund thinks, but because Regan was an impediment in her path to the throne of all Britain; and her reason for committing suicide was, probably, because she saw no other course open for her. Had she not done so she would have been arraigned for conspiracy to murder Albany, and, as there was a perfectly clear case against her, would have been duly executed.

## VIII

### BRUTUS'S MENTAL BREAKDOWN

ON a memorable night, several days after his conversation with Cassius at the feast of the Lupercalia, as Brutus stands in his orchard watching the progress of the stars, waiting for the dawn and for the arrival of the conspirators, his reflections are of the most gloomy. His talk with Cassius had set him on the rack and he can get no sleep.

“ Since Cassius first did whet me against  
Cæsar,  
I have not slept,”

he declares, and one is not surprised to hear it, if his mind was in anything like the state of tumultuous disorder he pictures so graphically in his soliloquy :

“ Between the acting of a dreadful thing  
And the first motion, all the interim is  
Like a phantasma, or a hideous dream :  
The genius and the mortal instruments  
Are then in council ; and the state of man,  
Like to a little kingdom, suffers then  
The nature of an insurrection.”

#### BRUTUS'S MENTAL BREAKDOWN

The mental conflict out of which such terrorizing feelings arose must have been one of no ordinary severity—bad enough, one would think, to send him far along the path leading to insanity, and certainly sufficiently disturbing to keep him awake a-nights. That he could continue to endure such mental tortures for any length of time without breaking down is highly improbable; but, no doubt, he was able to summon to his aid such support as he might extract from his stoicism, and he needed it all.

It seems probable that the thought of murdering Cæsar was not of quite such recent origin as might be inferred from Brutus's earlier speech: his words, "did whet me," imply, not that Cassius put the thought into his mind, but rather stimulated or made keen a thought that was already there. Such a suspicion receives some confirmation from his speeches to Cassius during their talk on the day of the feast:

" Vexed I am  
Of late with passions of some difference"

(mental conflicts), he tells Cassius; and later speaks of

" poor Brutus with himself at war."

And though we find him asking,

MADNESS IN SHAKESPEARIAN TRAGEDY

“ Into what dangers would you lead me,  
Cassius,  
That you would have me seek into myself  
For that which is not in me? ”

it seems likely that he knew quite well all the time; for we find him towards the end of the interview confessing :

“ What you would work me to, I have some  
aim:  
How I have thought of this and of these  
times,  
I shall recount hereafter.”

And so it would appear that, in spite of his question implying innocence of any design against Cæsar, he had really been thinking deeply in murderous mood all the time, somewhat after the manner of Macbeth when he declares :

“ My thought, whose murder yet is but fantastical,  
Shakes so my single state of man. . . . ”

Indeed, there are analogies, and very striking analogies, between the situation of Macbeth about to murder Duncan and of Brutus prepared for the assassination of Cæsar. There are similarities and also differences. Duncan is a king; Cæsar is a king in all but the name.

#### BRUTUS'S MENTAL BREAKDOWN

Macbeth is a close relation of his king, and is bound to him by feelings of personal regard and gratitude for benefits received; Brutus is, on credible authority, believed to be Cæsar's son, and is under even greater obligations to him than Macbeth is to Duncan. In the minds of both men the contemplation of the event creates terrible mental conflicts, stirring up the most profoundly distressing emotions, arising out of which Macbeth has hallucinations and Brutus equivalent experiences like phantasmata or hideous dreams, and, subsequently, hallucinations. Other resemblances are to be found in the circumstances of their victims, and that they are both gallant soldiers and persons of importance in the State.

Similarities in their dispositions also exist: for they are both full of the milk of human kindness—men in whose minds the emotional element is strongly represented, the reasoning power and faculty for forming correct judgments, relatively weak; and, as events demonstrate, they are both predisposed to mental breakdown. Their dissimilarities, though less notable, are also important. Macbeth is chiefly a man of action; Brutus a man of contemplation. Macbeth is urged, in the first instance, by his personal ambition and afterwards by his wife, to do the deed. The driving force behind Brutus is ostensibly, or, at any rate,

professedly, a sense of duty; even though the reasons he alleges for his action are not convincing. He is inconsistent in his arguments: at one time he says of Cæsar:

“ I have not known when his affections sway’d  
More than his reason.”

And a few lines farther down:

“ And, since the quarrel  
Will bear no colour for the thing he is,  
Fashion it thus. . . .”

In other words, he can bring forward no logically justifiable excuse for killing Cæsar; and yet, at the meeting of the conspirators, he speaks of “the time’s abuse” and of “high-handed tyranny,” after saying, in effect, that there were no abuses and that there was no tyranny. For the present, perhaps, it will be sufficient to say of Brutus and Macbeth that neither would have taken the extreme step of killing his victim had he not been impelled to the deed by external forces. Between Brutus and Hamlet, too, there are to be found certain mental resemblances. They are both men of essentially gentle, kindly, generous nature. They are both great readers and they incline to philosophy. In this, however, there is a distinction to be drawn. The philosophy of

#### BRUTUS'S MENTAL BREAKDOWN

Hamlet is not based on any system of philosophy, but is evolved out of his observations of and reflections on men and things; whereas Brutus's philosophy, even though he did not always act up to it, was that of the Stoics. Also, whereas Hamlet's behaviour is quite uninfluenced by philosophy, this is not so with Brutus. His conduct is guided by the principles of Zeno, always nominally, often actually. The problems before all three were, in the main, similar. They are all urged on by circumstances to the work of murdering persons in high places. The task of Brutus, however, was less exacting in the actual performance than those of Hamlet and Macbeth. These latter had to act alone. To each it was allotted to do the deed with his own hand; whereas Brutus had plenty of help, and was not even called upon to strike the first blow. It is probable that, before he struck at all, Cæsar was mortally wounded. Legally, of course, this would make no difference on a question of guilt. To the mind of the slayer—especially to his subconscious mind—the difference is great. In the case of Brutus the mental conflict arising out of the act of murder would be—other things being equal—less severe than those of the others—less liable to give rise to serious mental disorder. There exists in the minds of most men a very powerful resistance,



not necessarily against the wish to murder, but against the act of murder by one's own hand.

Othello, too, comes up for comparison. He is a man of noble, gentle, kindly nature, and, like Brutus, he is driven on by circumstances to kill a person he loves. His mental conflict, though different in respect of its content, in association with the event is at least as severe as those of the others. All of which considerations lead on to speculations on Brutus's mental condition; and, finally, as in the case of Hamlet, Macbeth and Othello, one asks the question: "Was Brutus mad or was he becoming mad?"—calling forth the counter-question: "What is madness?"—followed by the inevitable answer: "We do not know." And so the terms of the question must be altered to: "Had Brutus reached that stage of mental disorder which informed opinion would describe as insanity?" Even then the answer must be a qualified one, such as: "He had some symptoms which are not found among ordinary sane people, and which are frequent among the insane." Some of these symptoms he reveals in his address to the sleeping boy, Lucius:

"Boy! Lucius! Fast asleep? It is no matter;  
Enjoy the honey-heavy dew of slumber:

#### BRUTUS'S MENTAL BREAKDOWN

Thou hast no figures or no fantasies  
Which heavy care draws in the brains of  
men."

The inference is that *he* had "figures" and "fantasies"—fantasies in which thoughts of the assassination, and ideas associated therewith, kept rushing and clashing in his mind, and the more alarming "figures" or hallucinations formed after the manner of Macbdth's dagger. What they were he does not tell us; though, evidently, as in the case of Macbeth and his dagger, he realized their subjective nature. Such "figures" come only to people whose minds are the seat of painful conflicting thoughts and emotions, people who often do not sleep o' nights and who sometimes are liable during the day to display eccentricities of conduct which tell a tale of a disordered mind within. One such exhibition of Brutus's behaviour is graphically described for us by Portia:

"You've ungently, Brutus,  
Stole from my bed: and yesternight, at supper,  
You suddenly arose, and walked about,  
Musing and sighing, with your arms across;  
And when I asked you what the matter was  
You star'd upon me with ungentle looks."

From which description—especially from the last line—it seems in a high degree probable

#### MADNESS IN SHAKESPEARIAN TRAGEDY

that he was in a state of dissociated personality, in which while his eyes were open their sense was shut. In other words, he did not recognize his beloved wife, though he *appeared* to be staring at her. This opinion is strengthened by Portia's further disclosures :

. . . "you answer'd not,  
But, with an angry wafture of your hand,  
Gave sign for me to leave you."

It is next to impossible to believe that Brutus, almost worshipping his wife as he did, would have treated her in this way had he known and comprehended what he was doing at the time. And when she tells him,

"It will not let you eat, nor talk, nor sleep;  
And could it work so much upon your shape,  
As it hath much prevail'd on your condition,  
I should not know you, Brutus."

we realize that a profound mental change, a mental transformation recalling that of Hamlet, has come upon him during the interim between "the first motion" and now, when the hour is at hand to do the deed. With all these facts before us there need be no hesitation in coming to the conclusion that Brutus was suffering from a severe form of nervous anxiety, with abnormal mental happenings,

#### BRUTUS'S MENTAL BREAKDOWN

prolonged sleeplessness, hideous dreams and daydreams, visual hallucinations and the like; and, furthermore, that he was in no fit state to face the terrible ordeal in front of him. There is very little doubt but that at this time Brutus would have beaten a retreat if he could have done so; but he is "tied to a stake and cannot fly," and so we must think of him as a thoroughly miserable man in a state of uneasy apprehension, going forth from his house accompanied by the ague-stricken Caius Ligarius, with no better heart for his work than Macbeth had when he was approaching the chamber of the sleeping Duncan.

Things happen badly for him, too, after their arrival at the Capitol. The tedious waiting during the presentation of the petitions, the suppressed excitement and anxiety on the intervention of Popilius Lena, the terrible mental strain during those anxious moments when Metellus Cimber, supported by his fellow-conspirators, is preferring his suit for the recall of his brother, Publius—all these were, no doubt, beginning to make the situation almost unbearable for him, while all the time his heart was "earning" for Cæsar. Finally comes the ghastly scene of the murder, with the dying reproach, "*Et tu, Brute?*" from the lips of the man whose darling he had been, and the savage attack of the conspirators, as a

#### MADNESS IN SHAKESPEARIAN TRAGEDY

result of which the mighty Cæsar falls a lifeless, hacked, mangled mass, bleeding from three-and-twenty wounds, at the base of Pompey's statue.

As Brutus looks upon the mutilated

“ ruins of the noblest man  
That ever lived in the tide of time,”

one wonders if there came to him the recollection of his own words:

“ And, gentle friends,  
Let's kill him boldly, but not wrathfully;  
Let's carve him as a dish fit for the gods,  
Not hew him as a carcass fit for hounds.”

Whether or not he thought this, or whatever other stinging thoughts may have flashed through his mind (and there must have been many), there is one thing of which we may feel certain, and that is that the memory of this scene remained as a living torment to him till his dying day. We think of Lady Macbeth looking at the murdered Duncan lying in a pool of blood, and we remember her subsequent mental tortures and her sleep-walk.

In the high-tension scene immediately following the death of Cæsar—when anything might have happened—it seems, at first sight, surprising to find Brutus among the least agitated of the conspirators, and the one who

#### BRUTUS'S MENTAL BREAKDOWN

most readily and tactfully adjusted himself to the new situation—he who immediately before, and right up to the time of the assassination, was to all appearance a pronounced neurotic, with alarming signs of mental disorder. It might seem even as if this steady and courageous handling of a somewhat perilous state of affairs constituted in itself a disproof of the seriousness of his previous symptoms, or else that the reaction following the crime brought about a sudden “cure.” A little light breaks in on us when we recall an analogous situation in *Macbeth*, in which the hero at one moment—just before the “*knocking within*”—is little better than a lunatic, and a few minutes later is greeting the bodyguard of the murdered king with the most complete self-possession and *sangfroid*. Brutus's behaviour, like that of Macbeth, is an illustration of the fact that the presence of imminent danger often proves a powerful temporary restorative of self-control. The attitude of the citizens would be none too friendly. They were a fickle lot at the best, and his safety, and that of his colleagues in crime, depended on the way they might receive his apologia.

The sudden recovery of self-control is, in the last analysis, a response or reaction to the instinct of self-preservation—temporary, as it proved, in this instance; for in a short time he

#### MADNESS IN SHAKESPEARIAN TRAGEDY

and Cassius are riding like madmen through the gates of Rome in obedience to the call of another primitive instinct—the instinct of flight.

As we extend our acquaintanceship with Shakespeare's tragedies we find, or think we find, a certain uniformity of method in his treatment of his heroes. If we are correct in this surmise we shall expect—in conformity with our hypothesis—that two things have happened to Brutus during the considerable interval that must have elapsed between his flight from Rome and the establishment of his headquarters in camp near Sardis. We shall expect that he has been overtaken by further misfortunes and that his mental condition has become worse. The events attest the fulfilment of our anticipations. Portia, his

“true and honourable wife,  
As dear to me as are the ruddy drops  
That visit my sad heart.”

has committed suicide in a way that might have made an Aztec shudder. The news, as he imparts it to Cassius, has just come in from Rome that:

“impatient of my absence,  
And grief that young Octavius and Mark  
Antony



#### BRUTUS'S MENTAL BREAKDOWN

Have made themselves so strong;—for with  
her death  
That tidings came:—with this she fell distract,  
And, her attendants absent, swallowed fire.”

His beloved wife, unable any longer to bear the burden of evil fortune, has taken her life during an attack of insanity; while his enemies are in possession of Rome and are daily strengthening their position. One would think that the horror of his wife's death under such hellish circumstances would be sufficient to plunge him into the bottomless pit of sorrow and despair, but, apparently, he takes it with as much indifference as that with which Macbeth receives the news of *his* wife's death:

“ She should have died hereafter.”

When Cassius, who is obviously deeply and sincerely affected, exclaims in horror:

“ O ye immortal gods! ”

all he has to say is:

“ Speak no more of her. Give me a bowl of  
wine;  
In this I bury all unkindness, Cassius.”

When we remember that Brutus was at one time a gentleman (gentle man), and that

#### MADNESS IN SHAKESPEARIAN TRAGEDY

Portia was a woman for whose sake he, at that time, would undoubtedly have resigned his life without hesitation (and she was worth it), we realize that he is a *transformed* man—a man whose emotions, in his general mental disorganization, have become blunted, apparently to such an extent that he can no longer keenly feel sorrow. This general disorganization comes out very clearly in the “Quarrel scene,” during which there appear serious flaws in his reasoning powers and in his memory. He accuses the dead Cæsar of “supporting robbers,” though there is no evidence to support such a charge. He condemns Cassius and others for taking “base bribes,” while he himself, in order to pay his soldiers, would use the money coming from this tainted source. For no obvious reason he tells Messala that he has never heard of Portia’s death. Has he forgotten it, or what? During the whole interview, too, his attitude is one of moral self-exaltation and self-satisfaction, out of harmony with his affairs—domestic and military. Nor is it possible to say to what extent his apparent fortitude is due to a blunting of his mental faculties, or how much support he may be deriving from his acquired stoicism. However this may be, there is little doubt as to what is happening to him when his friends depart for the night and he is left

#### BRUTUS'S MENTAL BREAKDOWN

alone with Lucius. He is in a state of extreme restlessness. Instead of settling down to sleep, as he tells his friends he means to do when they have gone, he calls to Lucius for his dressing-gown and asks the drowsy boy to play to him. When he finds that Lucius is unlikely to keep awake he calls for Varro and Claudius to sleep in his tent with him, making, for doing so, an excuse which is manifestly frivolous. Again he will have Lucius play for him. He will do anything rather than be left alone with his thoughts. And when at last they are all asleep but himself a vague, strange feeling comes over him. He finds the taper burns ill. What is really happening is that dissociation of his personality is setting in and his sense organs are losing their functions. And now "his eyes are open but their sense is shut"; and out of his subconscious mind there is projected on to his altered consciousness the appalling hallucination of the murdered Cæsar. His blood runs cold. His hair stands on end and he is helpless in the grip of an awful terror. The words that seem to come to him from the "ghost" are purely hallucinatory and subjective. They express the thoughts of an accusing conscience.

Here once more we find the dramatist "between two stools." He must sacrifice one of two things — psychological verities or

dramatic effectiveness. The former must go, and so he represents Brutus—the man whose blood is running cold, whose hair is standing on end, and who is probably shaking with fright, like Hamlet or Macbeth in similar circumstances—as replying calmly to the ghost, unperturbed by Nemesis in the guise of a guilty conscience. He does not even try to disguise from himself the fact that he is afraid.

“Now I have taken heart thou vanishest,”

he exclaims after the dreadful hallucination has faded.

“Why so; being gone  
I am a man again.”

says Macbeth, with infinite relief, as the picture of the murdered Banquo vanishes. But Brutus is still very agitated.

“Boy! Lucius! Varro! Claudius! Sirs,  
awake!  
Claudius!”

he shouts in his excitement, and then, to cover his fear and to make an excuse for waking them up, he suggests what is not true:

“Didst thou dream, Lucius, that thou so  
criedst out?”

#### BRUTUS'S MENTAL BREAKDOWN

and anxiously inquires if he saw "anything." He goes through the same performance with Varro and Claudius, but they all reply in similar terms, to the effect that they were not aware that they cried out (as, of course, they did not) and that they had seen nothing.

The point of interest here is that Brutus no longer recognizes the subjective nature of his "figures." He believes he has seen a real ghost. In other words, he is much worse mentally than he was before the murder. His general tendency is to drift towards *melancholia*. This is what one would expect in accordance with the view that a person's progressive madness follows the path indicated by his natural disposition and by his ordinary trend of thought. Brutus was naturally a contemplative, serious man, with a leaning towards the sad, unpleasurable things of life. He was not "gamesome" and did lack some part,

"Of that quick spirit that is in Antony."

His second hallucination was in this sense. The ghost probably tells him—that is, his thoughts, now turned definitely to suicide, express to him in audible tones—that his "hour is come."

His last words, implying a wish to die, are

MADNESS IN SHAKESPEARIAN TRAGEDY

typical of the usual sentiments of a melancholiac in the act of suicide:

“ Cæsar, now be still;  
I killed not thee with half so good a will.”

His suicide only anticipated what would shortly have happened in any case—even if he had won the battle.

## IX

### TIMON'S MEGALOMANIA

IN *Timon of Athens* Shakespeare transports us into a new domain of insanity. There is no one in the tragedies whose mental features resemble those of Timon. In him we meet a madman without conflicts or care, happy as a Falstaff, but—unlike that gay Adonis of sixtyround the waist, whose vocation it is to rob—engaged in entertaining his friends in regal fashion and giving away money, jewellery, anything a friend may express a liking for, nearly as fast as he can give them—happy in giving and happy in the belief that his supply is inexhaustible, rejoicing in his own overflowing good nature, which knows no limit.

“Methinks I could deal kingdoms to my  
friends,  
And ne’er be weary,”

he exclaims, absolutely bubbling over with the gladness of passing on his property to others, gloating in the fullness of his joy in giving. “Thou givest so long, Timon, I fear me thou wilt give away thyself,” the cynical



MADNESS IN SHAKESPEARIAN TRAGEDY

but—on this occasion, at any rate—well-meaning Apemantus tells him.

“ O my good lord ! the world is but a word ;  
Were it all yours to give it in a breath,  
How quickly were it gone ! ”

moans the despairing Flavius, after all the money is spent and the property mortgaged up to the hilt. And Timon can only reply :

“ You tell me true.”

He is quite aware of his failing and unable to help himself. He does not try, apparently. No doubt he feels a certain majestic pride in giving to lords and gentlemen, servants, painters, poets, generals, and others, whose patron he would be. This large-handed generosity is associated, naturally, with a magnified view of his own importance and power. Something of this appears in his authoritative message to the senate :

TIMON (*to another servant*) : Go you, sir, to  
the senators—  
Of whom, even to the state's best health, I  
have  
Deserv'd this hearing—bid 'em send o' the  
instant  
A thousand talents to me.

### TIMON'S MEGALOMANIA

Thousands of pounds were a mere trifle to him. One thing is clear about Timon—namely, that, whatever may be the precise *form* of mental disorder from which he was suffering, he was certainly a megalomaniac, a self-exalted man, a man with delusions of grandeur, beliefs in his wealth and power, not borne out by facts.

Curiously enough, these delusions of power seem to become more pronounced after the crash comes, when he walks out alone from Athens, “A dedicated beggar to the air,” and falls a-cursing. It is then we learn how all-powerful he appears to himself to be. He is a superman. He can work miracles. There is nothing he cannot do. He will turn the whole of society upside down. By the force of his will-power he will make mothers unchaste, children disobedient, convert virgins into prostitutes, sons into parricides, servants into thieves and debtors into murderers. He will demoralize the whole of society.

“Lust and liberty  
Creep in the minds and marrows of our  
youth,  
That 'gainst the stream of virtue they may  
strive,  
And drown themselves in riot!”

he exclaims, and he will make them suffer the

MADNESS IN SHAKESPEARIAN TRAGEDY

inevitable results of uncurbed licentiousness  
and indiscriminate sexual intimacies :

“ Itches, blains,  
Sow all the Athenian bosoms, and their crop  
Be general leprosy ! ”

“ Piety, and fear,  
Religion to the gods, peace, justice, truth,  
Domestic awe, ”

and, in fact, all institutions and customs made  
by society for its own protection he will sweep  
away,

“ And yet confusion live ! ”

And, be it observed, he can do all this himself. Only as an afterthought does he appeal to the gods in a general way to confound the Athenians and to foster his hatred of the whole human race—high and low. He is himself the avenging god who can work these miracles, and he seems blind to the incongruity between his own poverty and helplessness and his possession of supernormal powers. It *may* seem strange that Timon apparently sees no lack of fitness or proportion in the nature and extent of the punishment he would inflict on his fellow-countrymen and women, many of them innocent, or, at any rate, inoffensive to him. Just because a number of his selfish aristocratic

#### TIMON'S MEGALOMANIA

acquaintances have exhibited somewhat more than ordinary ingratitude towards him he will cast all the inhabitants of his native city into the black pit of destruction. Incidentally, he seems to have forgotten that he himself is a defaulter—unable to discharge his debts. It *would* seem strange were it not for the fact that Timon is mad, and therefore not responsible for his utterances. Moderation and consistency are not to be expected in his disordered mind. His reasoning power and judgement have become badly damaged, and have lost control of his passions and emotions. Often, as in the case of Lear and Hamlet, in his darker moments modesty and delicacy of feeling disappear and the coarser side of the man is shown in all its ugly nakedness. In Timon the tendency—so very common in the insane—to dwell on matters of sex takes an unusual turn. He seems to have a special predilection for lingering on the loathsomeness of venereal disease, and the deforming and destructive ravages it makes on all parts of the body—the skin, the bones, the throat, the bridge of the nose, which it may eat quite away, and the organs of generation, which lose their power of functioning. His references to this disease are frequent and pointed. He dwells lingeringly on the signs of it on and in the body, and describes them not only accurately, but as fully as any physician

#### MADNESS IN SHAKESPEARIAN TRAGEDY

of the Elizabethan age could do—at which time there appears to have been no lack of material for observation. He assumes, very uncharitably, that Phrynia and Timandra are infected, and bribes them with some of his newly found gold in order to encourage them to pass on the disease to men—pious men for preference:

“ And he whose pious breath seeks to convert  
you,  
Be strong in whore, allure him, burn him up.”

His mind is a veritable cesspit. That the thoughts of the mad Timon should turn on sexual matters is not surprising to us who are already acquainted with the tragedies. Lear's thoughts when he is mad often take this turn—unpleasantly; Ophelia's love songs are frankly sexual; Hamlet's coarse conversation at the play, and on other occasions when he is off colour, runs on sex; *Othello* is a tragedy of sex, and Timon's thoughts in his madness are on sex disease. He seems to revel in it—*pudendagra*, as it was sometimes called in the sixteenth century, when it was a fairly prevalent though comparatively new disease. These thoughts of the insane person are not new thoughts, but thoughts long repressed and freshly dug up for the occasion from among old memories—

#### TIMON'S MEGALOMANIA

thoughts that people would willingly put away from them because of their intrinsic nastiness or their disagreeable associations. They are always recalled memories of personal experiences or fantasies, and one may pertinently ask how comes it that Timon waxes so bitterly eloquent on this very unattractive subject, until we begin to suspect that he knew more about the disease from personal experience than he actually discloses. Such a suspicion receives support from other considerations. His general bearing in the days of his prosperity, his happy mood, his delusions of immense wealth and power, and his impulsive and apparently compulsive desire to give away are, taken together, well-known signs of a form of insanity which is the direct outcome of infection with syphilis. So characteristically do all these symptoms show in Timon that anyone having more than a passing acquaintance with sufferers from this form of mental disorder can hardly fail to recognize in him an old familiar friend.

It is true that Timon in the second part of his career—after he leaves Athens—does not conform to type in one respect: he is no longer well disposed to his fellow-men; whereas the typical man is friendly to the last. But his main symptoms are retained. He is still the superman. He can call down curses on a wholesale

#### MADNESS IN SHAKESPEARIAN TRAGEDY

scale. His invocation to "Common mother" is very instructive as throwing light on his mentality:

"Ensear thy fertile and conceptionous womb,  
Let it no more bring out ingrateful man!  
Go great with tigers, dragons, wolves and  
bears;  
Teem with new monsters, whom thy upward  
face  
Hath to the marbled mansion all above  
Never presented!—O, a root; dear thanks!"

He would annihilate the human race and cause the earth to bring forth wild beasts and unheard-of monsters. It seems probable that he really believes he has the power to do this; and then, in a flash, behold him in ecstasies over the birth of—a root! And yet he sees nothing absurd about it. Why? Because his million-magnified ideas are in one compartment of his mind and his hunger sensations in another, and there is no communication between these chambers. A shabbily clad individual, an inmate of a mental hospital, once told me that he was the Prince of Wales and offered me a post worth two thousand pounds a year—to begin with. Next minute he wanted to borrow a sixpence and begged a cigarette.

Shakespearian critics are agreed that *Timon of Athens* falls short of that degree of dramatic



#### TIMON'S MEGALOMANIA

excellence which characterizes Shakespeare's great tragedies. Indeed, this is quite manifestly so.

“There needs no ghost, my lord, come from  
the grave  
To tell us this.”

Its defects have been docketed and reasons assigned for its shortcomings. To these latter I should like to add another which, I think, has not been previously noted. It is this. The madness of Timon was not of that kind that is adapted to the creation of thrilling dramatic situations. Such madness does not stimulate to action. It was not like that of Macbeth, full of sound and fury, signifying a great deal for the murdered victims of his wild rage and fear, horrifying the spectators with the appalling spectacle of a terrified human being in the grip of ghost-like, visual hallucinations, holding them in creepy attention to all that is happening under their eyes and wondering what the next uncanny sensation will be like. In comparison with this, Timon's madness was a tame kind of affair, expending itself in futile declamation and preposterous pretension to powers belonging to God alone.

Timon has no deep-seated mental conflict, and he can find temporary consolation for his grievances in success in searching for a root.

He can unpack his heart in words, but he does nothing. If Macbeth had been there instead of Timon he would have joined Alcibiades in his march on Athens, and then, God help the Athenians! The explanation of Timon's inactivity is to be found in the inertia of an organically diseased brain. All his vital processes, as well as his mental powers, were undergoing a process of degeneration, the manifestations of which, for dramatic reasons, are modified by the dramatist; and so Timon is made to appear at times more rational and in better health than he would be in reality. A strictly accurate picture of a mad leading character is hardly possible in drama. It is, however, possible to bring out the main features so as to leave very little or no doubt of the actual nature of the disorder, and this is what Shakespeare does.

The last days of Timon are, from a dramatic point of view, uneventful. He probably dies from starvation, or disease, or both. The slow gradations of decay—bodily and mental—terminating in death from natural causes are unsuitable for representation on the stage.

## X

### THE MANIA OF CONSTANCE

QUITE early in his life of creative activity Shakespeare realized the value of insanity as a potent instrument of wide application in the making of those plays in which the exhibition of excessive emotion is a prominent feature. In a few instances, in his tragedies, he uses madness as a lethal weapon—a substitute for stabbing, poisoning, strangling, and other modes of killing. A case in point is that of Constance, about whom we learn that, soon after Arthur is taken prisoner and sent to England, lost to her for ever, as she believes—correctly, as events prove—

“The Lady Constance in a frenzy died.”

—an unusually rapid ending as a result of madness; and one about which it may confidently be concluded that it was due to exhaustion consequent on a very severe attack of *acute mania*.

Of the on-coming of this terribly distressing disorder she was already throwing out signals or warnings—trumpets of prophecy—during

#### MADNESS IN SHAKESPEARIAN TRAGEDY

the scenes of her courageous denunciation of Austria and Philip for their infamous apostasy and betrayal of her cause.

To watch the rising tide of Constance's mania is of interest from more than one point of view. It is interesting as showing the origin, early growth and development of an attack of *acute mania*. It illustrates, finely, the enhancement of dramatic effect, in scenes of passion, by the infusion of a neurotic element—by the employment for dramatic purposes of highly emotional characters, highly strung people, ready to go off at a deep end under conditions of undue mental stress; and finally, it points to the poet's early adoption of insanity as a fundamental principle—a piece of necessary groundwork—for use in the construction of all his tragedies.

When Constance first appears on the scene she exhibits not the slightest trace of insanity. Her situation and prospects are not of a nature to cause her undue anxiety, far less to arouse in her mental storms of such violence as to throw her mind into disorder. Her darling boy is apparently also the darling of Lewis the Dauphin, of Austria and of King Philip; who not only profess their readiness to fight for him, on principle, as rightful heir to the throne of England, but also for the sake of the love and affection his attractive personality has won for him in their hearts. Little thinking what is in

#### THE MANIA OF CONSTANCE

store for her, she pours forth her thanks to her royal champions, Lewis and Austria, in words that attest the fullness of her gratitude :

“ O take his mother’s thanks, a widow’s thanks,  
Till your strong hand shall help to give him  
strength  
To make a more requital to your love.”

Her feeling of security for herself and for the future of her boy is further strengthened by Philip’s assurance concerning the recalcitrant Angiers :

“ We’ll lay before this town our royal bones,  
Wade to the market-place in Frenchmen’s  
blood,  
But we will make it subject to this boy.”

The very sensible reply of Constance to this savage, if reassuring, royal vow to further the cause of her boy should dispel any suspicions, if such exist, about her mental soundness :

“ Stay for an answer to your embassy,  
Lest unadvised you stain your swords with  
blood :  
My Lord Chatillon may from England bring  
That right in peace, which here we urge in  
war ;  
And then we shall repent each drop of blood  
That hot rash haste so indirectly shed.”

The entrance of Chatillon, followed quickly by that of King John with his train, is the first blow to her relative equanimity. The mother's instinct is aroused: the wolf is on prey after her lamb. But even in the intense excitement of her momentous battle of words with Elinor she does not lose her head, and in a contest of exceptional acrimony she gets the best of the argument. But when the fight is over she is exhausted. Her nervous organization was framed to bear only a limited amount of stress; and when she makes her escape into Philip's quarters, in a vain effort to find rest for her troubled spirit, we learn of her that

"She is sad and passionate at your highness' tent."

There, in seclusion, shut away from the turmoil of the scenes she has just left, she has time to ponder over events; and we probably shall not be far wrong in thinking of her as being in a state of great mental distress and passionate emotion, embracing her beautiful boy, clasping him to her bosom, while she is summoning up all kinds of visions, vague or vivid, as to what may happen. The solemn promises of kings and princes are sometimes broken, and John is a powerful and unscrupulous antagonist, wishing above all things to get Arthur into his clutches.

For a highly strung woman like Constance,

#### THE MANIA OF CONSTANCE

predisposed, as all Shakespeare's principal characters in tragedy are, to mental overthrow, the fierce and unequal contest in which she is engaging is too severe even for her splendid fighting powers, and the outlook is full of gloomy forebodings for the preservation of her sanity.

It is after the manner of Shakespeare, when he is out for driving people mad, that his victim shall not be accorded breathing time to recover from one blow before the delivery of another more damaging even than the first; and so it is while Constance's mind is in a state of violent commotion, consequent on her fierce encounter with the queen-mother, that the fateful announcement of the patched peace, to be sealed by the marriage of Blanch and Lewis, is made to her by Salisbury.

The effect of the news on Constance is to throw her into a state of profound agitation. Her reason is certainly disturbed. She cannot—or will not—believe the noble earl who brings such incredible tidings. She professes to think it is but a jest, a cruel jest certainly, for perpetrating which he should be punished. Has she not “a king's oath to the contrary”? By a curious trick of the mind her feelings of detestation for the actual offenders are transferred to the messenger. Her dismissal of the unoffending Salisbury—



“ Fellow, be gone: I cannot brook thy sight:  
This news hath made thee a most ugly man.”

—sounds like a faint echo of the anathema of the maddened Egypt on the messenger who brings her the news of Antony’s marriage to Octavia:

“ The most infectious pestilence upon thee! ”

But the feelings of the betrayed Constance are hardly less intense than those of the deserted Cleopatra.

The vigour of her denunciation of the usurping John and of the perjured France and Austria is stimulated by the intoxicating effects of commencing *mania*, very much in the same way as that in which wit is sharpened and anger fed in the early stages of alcoholic stimulation. Her eloquence in invective grows in strength under the influence of the maddening effects of disease, until it reaches a pitch beyond which scorn, scathing criticism and biting sarcasm can no further go.

She does not mince matters.

“ You are forsworn, forsworn,”

she tells Philip, and he cannot deny it.

With complete disregard of the respect customarily shown to royalty, she appeals, in

#### THE MANIA OF CONSTANCE

the very presence of these two false kings, France and Austria, to the Higher Powers to help her in her single-handed fight against their treacherous conspiracy, their unspeakably mean betrayal of her cause, in a tempest of words of blasting force, enough to wither them :

“ Arm, arm, you heavens, against these perjured kings!  
A widow cries: be husband to me, heavens!  
Let not the hours of this ungodly day  
Wear out the day in peace; but, ere sunset,  
Set armed discord ’twixt these perjured kings!  
Hear me! O, hear me! ”

The feeble interruption of Austria at this point of her invocation,

“ Lady Constance, peace! ”

serves but to increase the violence of her eloquence as she continues, in wild words that fall not far short in fury from what one might expect from a mad Cassandra, or one of the Eumenides :

“ War! war! no peace! peace is to me a war.  
O Lymoges! O Austria! thou dost shame  
That bloody spoil: thou slave, thou wretch,  
thou coward!  
Thou little valiant, great in villainy!  
Thou ever strong upon the stronger side!  
Thou Fortune’s champion, that dost never  
fight

#### MADNESS IN SHAKESPEARIAN TRAGEDY

But when her humorous ladyship is by  
To teach thee safety! thou art perjured too,  
And soothest up greatness. What a fool art  
thou,  
A ramping fool, to brag, and stamp, and swear,  
Upon my party! Thou cold-blooded slave,  
Hast thou not spoke like thunder on my side?  
Been sworn my soldier? bidding me depend  
Upon thy stars, thy fortune, and thy strength?  
And dost thou now fall over to my foes?  
Thou wear a lion's hide! doff it for shame,  
And hang a calf's skin on those recreant  
limbs."

From which wild outburst it may be perceived that the work of the *Deus* is progressing. "My medicine works," as Iago would say. The second shock—her betrayal by Austria and France—is having its effect. The poison of *mania*, administered in moderate doses at first, is exciting her worst passions, and inspiring her imagination to burst forth in language which, for eloquent vituperation—well aimed and accurately descriptive—would be difficult to surpass. But all this is happening at the expense of the controlling forces of her reason, manifested in her speech, excusable in view of the provocation, but ominous for the preservation of her mental soundness.

If, at this juncture, the *Deus* would only stay his hand, the "catastrophe" might be averted. But this is not his object. He has determined

to make her thoroughly mad before she dies. The visit of Pandulph affords her a little respite, but only a little. She endeavours to win his interest in her cause, and to obtain from him a holy endorsement of her curses on her arch-enemy, John; but her hopes in this quarter are soon dissipated: a papal legate has no time to listen to private grievances, or for any other matter except what concerns the authority of the Church. The unfortunate woman is driven to desperation: she has no one to fall back on for support. Her former friends, Lewis, Philip and Austria, have deserted her. Her old enemies, John and Elinor, with their late ally, Blanch, are joined in faction against her; and the only consolation—if it is a consolation—she gets from the fiery interview is to see John excommunicated.

With the break-up of the conference, the declaration of hostilities, the defeat of the allies, the triumph of John, the capture of Arthur and his deportation to England with the almost certain prospect of his being murdered, her last hopes are shattered. The *Deus* has inflicted his final blow. The *débâcle* is complete. Her subsequent speeches, her irrational behaviour in tearing out her hair, and the manner of her death, all go to prove conclusively that she has passed into a state of *acute mania*.

A case for argument arises from the difficulty

in reconciling the coherency of her language with the disorganization of her distracted mind. It is an insuperable difficulty; because, for artistic reasons, incoherent language is, in general, unsuitable for a theatrical audience. Her thoughts were those expressed by the words which the dramatist puts into her mouth. In reality, a person so mentally shattered as Constance was would have been incapable of expressing in coherent language, as she does, the ghastly creations of her battered mentality. Like many another lost soul she would seek relief from her distraction by passing into Nirvana. She is more than "half in love with easeful death." But her mode of wooing the grim visitor is after the fashion of madness rather than of love. Did ever man or woman yet woo lover in such gruesome terms as those in which Constance pays her court to Death?—

“Death, death:—O amiable lovely death!  
 Thou odoriferous stench! sound rottenness!  
 Arise forth from the couch of lasting night,  
 Thou hate and terror to prosperity,  
 And I will kiss thy detestable bones;  
 And put my eyeballs in thy vaulty brows;  
 And ring these fingers with thy household  
 worms;  
 And stop this gap of breath with fulsome dust,  
 And be a carrion monster like thyself:  
 Come, grin on me; and I will think thou  
 smilest,

THE MANIA OF CONSTANCE

And buss thee as thy wife. Misery's love,  
O, come to me!"

With the possible exception of Lady Macbeth, who may have committed suicide (we don't know), Constance is the only one of Shakespeare's mad characters who dies of madness. The sword, the dagger, poison and drowning account for the rest.











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